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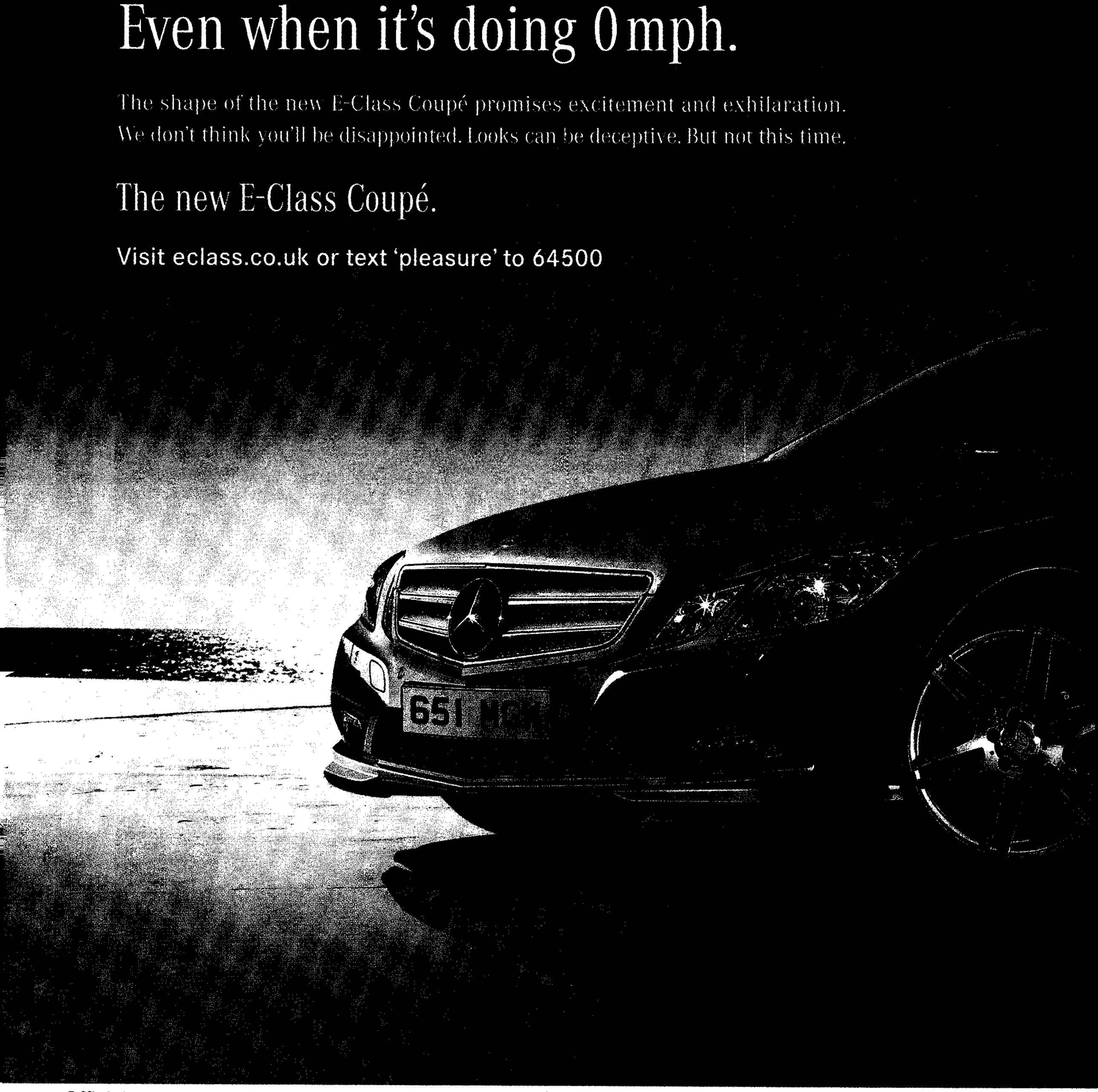

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That is why I am calling on my friend David Cameron to rein in the BBC or else I will tell my Dad not to support him in the election.

Got that, David? *(Applause)*

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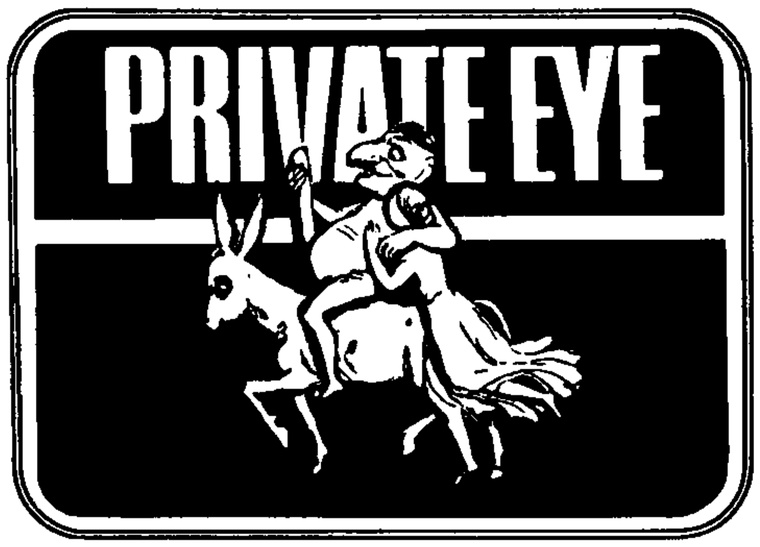

EYE TOLD YOU SO

ONE WEEK after the last *Eye* pointed out that Financial Services Authority chief executive Hector Sants had acted beyond his powers in taking into account the City's "competitiveness" when issuing his ineffectual guidelines on bankers' pay, up stepped chairman Lord (Adair) Turner to slap him down.

The FSA, said Turner, should "be very, very wary of seeing the competitiveness of London as a major aim". He also ventured the wildly controversial opinion that investment banking had got out of hand and suggested a tax on certain activities might not be a bad idea.

Cue outrage from the bankers who, along only with London mayor Boris Johnson and a Treasury that relies on bankers to set banking policy, seem to think it a bad idea. Most pointed out that by mentioning tax Turner had stepped outside his remit, a point they strangely failed to make a fortnight earlier when former investment banker Sants was whistling their tune.

HOW times have not changed. One year after the banking crisis that brought the global economy to its knees, The Economist Group is hosting a EuroFinance conference next month in Copenhagen.

"Meet the economists, futurists and regulators who are shaping your world," says the advertising blurb for what is described as "an essential event for senior finance professionals". Speakers include *Economist* editor John Micklethwait and "some of the brightest treasury minds from the world's top corporations".

And who is the "official lead sponsor" at this event? Er, the Royal Bank of Scotland, which had to be bailed out after recording the biggest corporate loss in UK history of £28bn.

Quite why British taxpayers should be funding the sponsorship of a three-day conference – in Denmark of all places – is a mystery. But RBS is not alone. Other sponsors are Bank of America/ Merrill Lynch and Citigroup, both of which have had to be bailed out by the US government. Yes, it's business as usual again and bonuses all round!

THE supposed clampdown on tax havens may prove slightly uncomfortable for the man in charge at the Treasury, permanent secretary Sir Nicholas Macpherson.

Eton-educated Sir Nicholas has an embarrassing dad, Ewen Macpherson, who has made a fortune from the shady world of offshore banking. At 79, he remains chairman of the London arm of Swiss private bank Notz Stucki and a director of its Bermuda-registered parent company, Notz Stucki Holdings Ltd. The company specialises in fund management, "family tax advice" and "international tax and estate planning". The London arm avoids any significant tax bill on its own profits by paying more than £1m a year in fees to another Bermudan company, Notz Stucki Management (Bermuda) Ltd.

This may not be the only aspect of the company's activities to raise eyebrows among the regulators overseen by Sir Nicholas's Treasury. Through its Plaza Investments, Notz Stucki funnelled client money into Bernie Madoff's corrupt operation and has already announced CHF120m (£69.5m) in compensation.

Tripolis all round!

- **Half cut, hazy brained and vomit stained: It's the Sun's new editor!** 7
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LIBYA may be a headache for Gordon Brown, but some people are doing very nicely from relations with President Gaddafi's government.

David Manning, who was Tony Blair's foreign policy advisor when Britain made overtures to Libya and played a crucial role in bringing the Gaddafi regime in from the cold, is now an executive of the BG Group, formerly British Gas, which has one of the most lucrative western energy contracts with Libya.

In 2003 Manning persuaded American secretary of state Colin Powell and his successor Condoleezza Rice to keep the hawkish John Bolton away from the talks with Libya. Bolton wanted Libya named as part of President Bush's "axis of evil", but Manning persuaded the Americans to treat Libya differently.

Manning, who was also involved in planning the Iraq war, remained influential in British foreign policy when he became Britain's ambassador to Washington in 2004.

In 2005 BG Group signed two major deals with Libya for gas exploration, followed in 2007 by a "joint announcement for cooperation" with Libya's National Oil Company. Now that the al-Megrahi case has been settled to Libya's satisfaction, observers expect this deal to lead to major work – a source of delight, no doubt, to Manning who left the diplomatic service in January 2008 and in July of that year started his £80,000-a-year part time job with BG Group.

80 Years Ago

"Only half a dozen men, the less energetic or the fainter hearted, still lay crouched in their cover and maintained a hectic fire on the patch where they thought Brown lay. They wasted ammunition at an amazing rate, but they made an encouraging noise even if they did nothing else. Brown, peering with one eye over the edge, could see two or three men actually only twenty yards below him and fifty yards away. Soon one of them would get a clear sight of him, and that would be the end. He felt no resentment, either against Fate or against the men who were about to take his life; he had done all he could." – *CS Forester, Brown on Resolution (1929).*

BROWN MEETS GADDAFI (2)

Street Of Shame

"RUPERT Murdoch's decision to start charging for all his new websites – and stop giving content away for free – increases the likelihood that he will close the pisspoor freesheet *thelondonpaper*," we reported in the last *Eye*. And so it came to pass: a day later News International told the freesheet's 60 staff that it was to be axed.

NI's new chief executive Rebekah Brooks was the person behind this mercy killing. As the *Eye* pointed out, she gave a fairly large clue to her intentions last month by not bothering to join the board of NI Free Newspapers, publisher of *thelondonpaper*, but did join as a director of the other key NI subsidiaries – News Group Newspapers, publisher of the *Sun* and *News of the World*, and Times Newspapers, publisher of the *Times* and *Sunday Times*.

While the closure of *thelondonpaper* is a blow to the Murdochs' pride, Rupert's eco-warrior son James, who chairs NI, can console himself that the decision is environmentally sound. When quizzed by the *Observer* in June about the ethics of flooding London with 500,000 copies a day of a paper no one wanted to read, James replied lamely: "Our freesheet, *thelondonpaper*, is a very efficient way for a different audience to consume news. We encourage people to recycle it." As the Digger's heir apparent has now realised, it's so much more efficient just to shut it down!

"WE MUST become a nation of meddlers," declared the *Daily Mail* on 12 August, recruiting the unlikely figure of Yasmin Alibhai-Brown to advise readers on how they should behave in the wake of the naming of Baby P's abusers. "As a society we need to become more interfering within families and neighbourhoods."

Regular columnist Allison Pearson gave her two penn'orth too: "The fatal mistake of Haringey social services was to apply what they called a Rule of Optimism to Tracey Connelly… Why not make poor Peter's legacy a shift in policy towards a Rule of Pessimism? To the swift removal of vulnerable children?"

Quite some U-turn, given that the *Daily Mail* has long been the scourge of social workers who dare to remove children from their parents or attempt to interfere in their rearing in any way. So how long did this new pro-nanny state stance last? Er, two days, until the paper's ever-dependable investigations editor Sue Reid produced the 2,500-word tale of how "This mother went on the run across Europe after social workers tried to snatch her son. Her crime? Letting him see her husband shout at her..."

On 18 August came revelations of another "kafkaesque battle against social services" bent on a "child snatch"; and the following day saw a sympathetic interview with a keen smacker who lost her job after a social services investigation. "The mother of three said it was 'nobody else's business' how decent parents choose to chastise their children at home," noted the paper approvingly.

THE *Sun*'s TV critic Ally Ross has been away for some time, even by his standards – more than a month. What is keeping him from his column?

Er, haemorrhoids: the happy-go-lucky hack has undergone surgery to have his piles removed. Mercifully, a colleague assures us, "his arse will have recovered sufficiently to be talked out of again very shortly".

ROLLING DACRES

WHO lives in a house like this? With its eight bedrooms, four bathrooms and gun room in the East Wing, it lies at the centre of the 15,355-acre Langwell Estate seven miles north of Ullapool in the Scottish Highlands.

Langwell comes complete with four estate cottages, 40 hill lochs, sheltered anchorage, salmon and sea trout fishing, "first class red deer stalking averaging 23 stags and 35 hinds per annum", grouse shooting and its own hill farm, complete with a flock of more than 500 Cheviot sheep and what the agents describe as "valuable Single Farm Payment entitlements".

It was sold last month for £3.5m to what the local paper, the *West Highland Free Press*, described as a "controversial figure". A former RBS executive? A Russian oligarch perhaps? Tony Blair?

No, the purchaser is none other than Paul Dacre, editor of the *Daily Mail,* whose generous investment in the Scottish economy came as his paper was enthusiastically predicting economic "payback time" for the country over the release of Lockerbie bomber Abdelbaset Al-Megrahi and taking editorial potshots at "puffed-up" and "obscure nationalist politicians", "third raters who speak for a faction in one corner of the kingdom" and "the folly of Scottish devolution". Dacre – who took home £1.62m last year for his sterling work railing against City fat cats – will no doubt be looking forward to some fascinating discussions with his new neighbours.

Mail executive managing editor Robin Esser last week told the local paper that he "could not say" what plans Mr Dacre has for his new purchase. But given that it is a 488-mile commute from the paper's Kensington office, could it indicate that the moment he will surrender his throne to contend with the fretful element upon his very own heath is finally close at hand?

AS *Observer* hacks wait to hear if Alan Rusbridger and his Scott Trust chums will kill off their title, coded messages to the underground resistance are creeping into print.

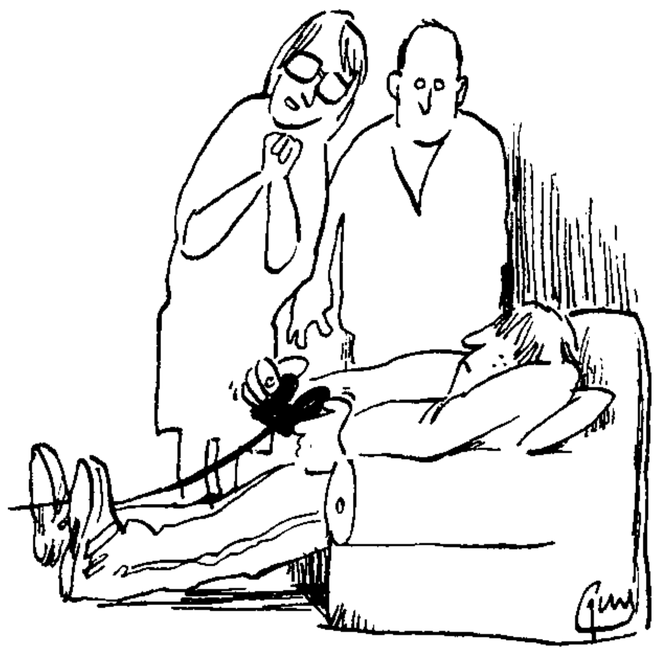
Reviewing *Top Gear*, the paper's TV critic Kathryn Flett notes that "according to Clarkson, J, it only takes four people to pick up a G-Wiz and throw it into a canal, but (he reminded us, as if we needed reminding) this is something one really ought not to do under any circumstances, however tempting it may be." This is of course a reference to the G-Wiz-driving Alan Rubbisher, whose office in King's Place overlooks the Regent's Canal.

Mutterings of dissent can even be heard in Rubbisher's own paper. Last week the *Grauniad* devoted an entire editorial, rather surprisingly, to the travails and possible closure of the *Reader's Digest,* but readers who persevered to the end probably spotted a sub-text. "It would certainly be a shame," the leader concluded, in a none-too-cryptic message to the Scott Trust, "to lose a publication which has been part of the furniture of our lives for so many years."

SUMMER QUIZ

Q: Which gutter tabloid was the first newspaper to break the Press Complaints Commission code of practice on payment to convicted criminals or their associates; has had complaints upheld against it for interviewing and photographing children without their parents' consent and committing "unnecessary intrusion" into the life of a school-age child on the grounds that his parents were famous; and this week became the only one so far to break the PCC-brokered "gentlemen's agreement" with Number 10 not to print photographs of Gordon Brown's children?

A: The *Daily Telegraph.*



"We just want you to know, if you wanted to sail around the world we won't stand in your way"

THE *Telegraph* was well placed to cover the fire that broke out on the rooftop of Google's London office last Thursday since it was bang opposite the paper's own HQ in Buckingham Palace Road. Hacks needed only to look out of the window to spot it.

Yet this isn't how they got the story, oddly enough. "Witnesses in neighbouring blocks broke news of the fire on Twitter, the micro-blogging web-site, this afternoon," the online *Telegraph* revealed. "'There's a tree on fire on one of the Google office roof terraces across the road,' wrote one."

Which Twittering witness was this? Step forward Ian Douglas, head of digital production at, er, the Telegraph Media Group, who thereby scooped his own website by half an hour – which may explain why the *Telegraph* chose not to identify him. Nor, wisely enough, did it quote the rather heartless coda to his Tweet: "Run, Googlers, run."

"JLS singer Aston Merrygold is becoming something of a fixture on the London party scene," confided showbiz column "London Eye" in the Mail group's piss-poor free paper *London Lite* on 20 August.

"But Aston knows that despite his band's meteoric rise, you haven't made it until you are snapped with the ubiquitous 'mystery woman'. The 21-year-old was spotted last night accompanying this stunner."

The mysterious stunner in question was (as every other showbiz columnist managed to spot) Jade Ewen, who sang the British entry for the Eurovision song contest all of three months ago. Astonishingly, *London Lite* was not the daily freebie that was put out of its misery that very afternoon.

THE *Daily Mail* was horrified at the end of last month to learn that the BBC was preparing a drama on the murders of five prostitutes in Suffolk.

As hand-wringing *Mail* hack Paul Revoir roared: "There were concerns that the drama will be shown only three-and-a-half years after the killings, with the emotions of many involved 'still raw'."

Strange then that the *Mail* was less quick to attack a journalist who back in December 2006 – just six months after the murders – decided that the emotions of the bereaved were not "still raw" enough to stop him putting the boot in to their murdered daughters.

"It may not be fashionable in some quarters to say so, but in their line of 'work', death is an occupational hazard," sniped the hack. He went on: "In the scheme of things, the death of these five women is no great loss."

Did the *Mail* find space to condemn this heartless scumbag? Er, no. But then it was its own £700k-a-year columnist Richard Littlejohn.

"Yes very funny, son... Just fix the damn thing, will you?"

HEY! Want to see dirty pictures? One website – unrestricted and freely available to minors – has featured the following steamy snaps in recent weeks...

"Lady GaGa strips naked for photoshoot"; "Grey's Anatomy star Eric Dane in nude video with wife and former Miss Teen USA"; "Bootylicious Beyonce shows off her curves"; "In bed with Courtney Love: rock widow posts intimate snaps"; "Braless Nadine Coyle steals the show"; "Alesha Dixon flashes sparkly knickers while Lily Allen wears see-through top"; "Big Brother Sophie puts her curves on show as she oils herself up in wrestling task"; "Danielle Bux's strapless number millimetres away from exposing too much of the 30-year-old's ample bust"; "All grown up: Coronation Street's Helen Flanagan shows off her figure in PVC leggings" and "Stripper on the subway: photographer takes pictures of nude model"?

And so on. But which site was responsible for such delights? Skinindex? Bianca's Smut Shack? The *Sunday Sport*? Er, no. All these and more can be found on Paul Dacre's throbbing online organ, dailymail.co.uk. And while you're there, don't forget to check out hackette Olivia Lichtenstein's coruscating report on internet porn from 29 July, which concluded: "It's another example of the internet subtly debasing society – and chipping away at the self-respect of men and women alike."

"'QUALITY journalism is not cheap.' I'm sorry, I thought we were talking about the *Sun*?" chortled the *Telegraph*'s head of technology (editorial), Shane Richmond, in his blog on the day Rupert Murdoch announced that he planned to charge for online access to his newspapers.

"This is a great opportunity for the *Mirror*, the *Daily Star* and, I suppose, producers of pictures of topless women, to hoover up those Sun readers who aren't sure whether they want to pay."

Among the "most-clicked" stories on Telegraph.co.uk in recent weeks: "Is the Loch Ness Monster on Google Earth?"; "Michael Jackson 'still alive' in conspiracy theory video posted on web"; "Mutilated Playboy model identified by her breast implants"; "Vampire baboon attack"; "Massive wave of jellyfish to attack Japan"; "Cute exotic baby animals PICS".

Can Dec anally match Ant?

AN *Express* sub-editor tried to write the headline "Can Dec finally match Ant?" in last Saturday's issue, only to come up with a rather more interesting question.

We trust Dirty Des will show some mercy. *Express* subs spend much of their time struggling to bowdlerise the listings for the paper's sister TV station, Television X – including such masterpieces as *Anal Addicts*, *Anal Angels* and *All New Anal Teens*. Is it any wonder that they're anally obsessed?

HACKWATCH

Dominic Mohan

"WITH talent like this, can promotion to the big chair be far away?" asked the *Eye* in July 2004, noting the astute political insight of *Sun* assistant editor Dominic Mohan, who headlined a story on the BNP "Barking Nobhead Plonkers."

Five years on, Mohan is finally making his ascension. But a low media profile in recent years means few outside Wapping have much idea of what really makes the new *Sun* editor tick. The *Eye* looks back at his short-lived opinion column, which ran from 2003-2004, to get the measure of the man and his take on the issues likely to dominate the *Sun*'s front pages in coming months...

On his attitude to life...

"Premature ageing is my greatest fear. I don't mind looking old, I just don't want to behave like a negative middle aged bore. I always intend to go to bed early but fail every time and haven't a clue what my bank balance is. I run and fall over constantly... My favourite film is *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory*. I can't ever sleep on Christmas Eve and I steal deodorant and my dad's socks when I go home because I can't be arsed to buy them myself."

On masculinity...

"I'm going to pucker up and admit it – yes, I kiss men. Don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about tongue sarnies and tickling tonsils, but just what is wrong with a peck on the cheek with a similar-minded chap? You may say you can take the man out of showbusiness... but I'm no luvvie. Me hetero, not metro or homo."

On body image...

"Boozed-up lads will strip off and the bottom line is that most of us have pulled a moonie on our hols."

"To gauge the actual size of the pop princess's peachy butt, we took our tape measure to London's Madame Tussaud's. Their experts used scientific callipers to take 500 measurements of Kylie's body to get a perfect match for her waxwork... Her rear is 11¾in (295mm) across – compared with my own svelte 14¼in (360mm)."

"Welcome to Dominic Mohan's Big Willy Guide. My special Hung-ometer reveals who is really big in showbiz – and exposes the bit-part players. I'm off the end of the scale myself – but I'm not saying which end."

On editorial forward planning...

"In one of my finer journalistic moments, I branded Jade Goody a pig. But it seems Jade is having the last oink, sorry, laugh. Admittedly, the *Sun* has played a part in the cult of Jade – paying her a trough-load of cash on eviction. However, we didn't dream there would still be currency in her a year on. Inexplicably, the new mum-of-one is still hot property – and I'm baffled."

"Justin Timberlake isn't a superstar. He has little natural talent and will be forgotten in five years. Just mark my words... You won't be hearing his records on the radio in three years' time and his album will soon be gathering dust on shelves around the world." [*Justin Timberlake's most recent number one record was in 2008 – exactly five years after Mohan made this prediction.*]

"The lardiest one, Bryan McFadden, quit Westlife this week but Nicky Whatsisname, the Shane bloke, Kian Thingymajig and The Other One have vowed to continue. I give them a year." [*Since this prediction in 2004, Westlife have recorded a further four albums.*]

"Manufactured dirge collective Girls Aloud have been moaning that they are 'only' paid around £80-a-day. Save as much as you can, girls. Believe me, you'll need it one day very soon." [*Since this warning in August 2003, Girls Aloud have had a further 17 top ten hit singles.*]

"The reality is that Reality TV is dead. *Big Brother 4* is the final nail in the coffin of a now-bland telly genre which kept us amused for four years... We've all grown tired of seeing a tedious and average gang battling for their three minutes of fame." [*Five of the subsequent six series of Big Brother have been given enthusiastic coverage by the Sun – and Mohan himself (see below).*]

On Strictly Come Dancing...

"Waltz a load of rubbish – the BBC unveil their new weapons in the ratings war. The new prime-time Saturday night extravaganza *Strictly Come Dancing*... the original show was told to Foxtrot Oscar in 1996 because it was crapola. Glad to see the licence fee isn't going to waste."

On "Nation's Sweetheart" Cheryl Cole (née Tweedy)...

"She is an ignorant thug... Shows like *Pop Idol*, *Popstars* and *Big Brother* propel scumbags like Tweedy straight from the check-out till to the pages of *OK!* mag... They just end up arrogant, bullying and abusive. Like Tweedy."

On TV standards...

"We've spied on topless mud wrestling, bap squeezing, plate smashing, a rooftop protest, spanking, wedgies and buttocks, not to mention a little late-night choking of the chicken... a bunch of two-faced, vindictive, aggressive, subnormal, sexually-charged show-offs. And that is the way I like my TV...

"This is exactly what reality TV is supposed to be. It is why the flippin' thing was invented. I want to see anger and violence, I want to see bitching and feuding." [*On Big Brother 5, when security guards had to enter the house to separate fighting contestants.*]

On the 2012 Olympics...

"We must move heaven and earth to keep this nonsense away from our shores. Look up pointless in the dictionary and you'll see those five rings. It's an event the size of football's glorious World Cup tournament, with all the attendant mayhem, but crucially WITHOUT any sport worth watching."

On domestic violence...

"David Gest alleges that Liza regularly battered him (what a wimp) during their tempestuous marriage. The case is bound to be thrown out, though, as any judge can clearly see that Gest has one of those faces you just can't resist punching."

On binge drinking...

"Half-cut, hazy brained and vomit stained, how many of us have spluttered: 'Never again?' With our heads and tongues hanging doggy-style out of a taxi window after a night out, most have at some stage pledged to quit drinking... A communal hangover among family or work colleagues can cement a bond – a shared and blurred morning-after trophy of the night before. I'll miss those giggly moments of collective nausea."

"Sorry – we can only fit two of you in at a time"

FOLLOWING Jack Straw's reform of parliamentary allowances, the justice secretary smugly believes that this year's expenses scandal has now blown over. He should not be so confident.

Straw and two other men who have played critical roles in the cover-up of the scandal and subsequent reform of the system are still not coming clean with the electorate about what they themselves charged us and when. Large gaps still remain in Straw's published expenses records as well as those of the chairman of the standards and privileges committee, Sir George Young, and David Maclean, the Conservative MP who led the campaign to prevent publication of MPs' expenses.

On at least three occasions the justice secretary has been forced to repay expenses having overcharged parliament for both council tax claims and the mortgage at his second home. Sir George Young, meanwhile, claimed more than £100,000 from the public purse for his flat in Victoria – in walking distance of the House. However, what both men charged us in financial year 2004-5 remains unknown since the details of both their additional costs allowance (ACA) and incidental expenses remain unpublished.

Similarly, the ACA of David "two mistresses" Maclean has not been published at all for the financial year 2005-6 – a significant oversight given that Maclean spent thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money renovating a farmhouse before selling it for £750,000 at the end of that financial period. At the time he was the Conservative party's chief whip, though he will now stand down at the next election.

Straw and Young have good reason to feel chipper about their records remaining unpublished. In the last two months the *Eye* has made repeated requests to parliament for the information which finally elicited the following statement: "When the electronic and paper records were searched for the preparation of the release of material certain elements couldn't be located and were therefore deemed not to be held by the House. Those that have subsequently become available will be published when the next tranche of allowances data is released [ie that data relating to 2008/09 and 2009/10]." Helpfully for Young and Straw, that will probably be after the next election.

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Orton Oracle

WIMBLEDON MP Stephen Hammond has conducted a curious democratic "experiment" – asking constituents to shell out £15 to attend a surgery.

Hammond and three Tory councillors invited residents to try out a "different way to meet and discuss concerns" at a Wimbledon bar-restaurant in August. However, the invitation added: "This is only open to [residents] who book for the buffet."

Constituents were asked to drop off cheques for £15, to pay for the meal, a glass of wine and, er, access to their democratically-elected representatives.

CONFERENCE COUNTDOWN

DAVID CAMERON has warned lobbyists to keep their distance at the Conservatives' forthcoming party conference in Manchester. With the keys to No 10 within his grasp, the last thing Dave needs is another cash-for-access scandal. But corporations that want to get close to the PM-in-waiting can always go the think-tank route.

Policy Exchange is the most Cameroonian of these bodies, and its preliminary conference timetable shows how easy it is for business interests to pay for face time with shadow ministers.

Shadow energy minister Charles Hendry will be speaking about "energy security and decarbonisation" courtesy of Oil & Gas UK, the trade body for the North Sea oil firms, alongside the group's chief executive. As the meeting is being paid for by the oil lobby, energy security will most likely trump global warming, and wind and wave power, like energy saving, will not get much of a look-in.

Shadow health minister Stephen O'Brien will be discussing whether funding for long-term care should be by "individual, state or partnership". The answer may well be by "partnership" because the meeting is being paid for by Partnership Assurance which specialises in funding elderly care through equity release and insurance schemes and so has a direct interest in less government funding for elderly care.

Fellow shadow health minister Mark Simmonds meanwhile will discuss whether "We need more public health initiatives for the worried well?" The obvious answer would be "No we don't", but as the meeting is sponsored by Alliance Boots, which would love to be involved in government health initiatives to drum up more business, the answer may well be in the affirmative.

Shadow business minister Mark Prisk is addressing a meeting called "Britain won't be great if we don't make anything anymore", paid for by the arms firm BAE Systems. He will speak alongside BAE's spin doctor, Bob Keen. BAE's contribution to Britain's greatness includes taking huge amounts of the defence budget for military kit marred by cost overruns and late delivery – overpriced and late schemes like the Astute Class Submarine (£1bn over cost, four years late) about which the Tories have been making a fuss.

The British Airports Authority, so close to the current government, is taking no chances with a new administration and so is sponsoring a meeting on "infrastructure" with George Freeman, Cameron's "A List" candidate for the safe Tory Mid Norfolk seat. BAA's spin doctor, former spokesman for Tony Blair Tom Kelly, will also address Tory delegates at the meeting.

Shadow culture minister Ed Vaizey meanwhile will be talking about "the future of television" on a platform funded by BT Vision, alongside the TV-on-the-internet firm's chief executive. BT Vision is of course currently lobbying the government to merge with Channel 4. So no hidden agenda there, then.

Fringe Benefits

HOW easy it is for big business to set up a fringe conference meeting with a tame government or shadow minister for just a few thousand pounds has been spelled out by the Social Market Foundation think tank.

In return for sponsorship, the funder gets to help decide what the minister talks about; seat its own executive at top table next to the minister; and help choose who else appears on the panel with them.

The SMF set out the ground rules in its pitch to companies promoting its series of meetings at the forthcoming party conferences. Though it calls itself as an "independent" think tank, it nevertheless seems happy to let its funders do all the thinking for it. "Our sponsors benefit from ongoing involvement in discussions about the subject matter and overall design of the fringe event," it promises. Further benefits include "space for banner stands and associated literature at the event" and "individual targeted invitations to prospective attendees".

Sponsors must of course be comfortable with the foundation's proposed "themes", but as the think tank "champions policy ideas which marry markets with social justice", and as its themes are strongly focused on privatisation and regulation, this should be no bar to most big companies.

Some top Tory and Labour MPs have already agreed to speak at SMF corporate-sponsored conference events. At Labour's get-together in Brighton at the end of the month, Treasury secretary Stella McCarthy-Fry MP will talk about "sensible financial planning" on a platform sponsored by private pensions firm Aegon, alongside the firm's chief executive. Aegon has every reason to want ministers to encourage investment in private pension firms like, er, Aegon. But its qualifications for "sensible financial planning" are less certain: it relies on a €3bn bailout from the Dutch government.

At the Tory conference in Manchester, shadow transport minister Stephen Hammond will talk about his pet subject courtesy of the Freight Transport Association, no doubt pushing the hauliers' view. However, there are still places for ministers and their shadows up for grabs at other SMF meetings paid for by Lloyds Bank Group, Vodafone, lottery operator Camelot and the private train firm Go Ahead.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"A short-term study of Twitter has found that 40 percent of the messages sent via it are 'pointless babble'." – *BBC News, 17 August.*

"Labour appoints it very own 'Twitter tsar'." – *BBC News, 17 August.*

NUMBER CRUNCHING

10% "Savage" cuts government insists Conservatives will make to public spending if elected

18.5% Amount government is trying to cut from housing benefit

ORDER, ORDER!

"Speaker John Bercow was condemned yesterday for spending £20,000 to refurbish his lavish grace-and-favour flat… Mr Bercow has defended his profligacy by saying he shopped in Ikea and still sleeps in the same bed as predecessor Michael Martin." – *Daily Mail.*

"Everything here is organic, free range, naturally produced, locally sourced, pesticide free, minimally packaged and fairly traded – and yet, ironically, I *am a complete bastard"*

CAN I TAKE YOUR AUDIT NOW?

WHILE Audit Commission chief executive Steve Bundred preaches austerity, he's quite happy to splash taxpayers' cash on dinners at London's swankiest restaurants, the *Eye* has discovered.

To the list of novel uses to which Bundred puts funds intended for controlling spending in local government and the health service – including tax avoidance plans for Audit Commission staff and bumper pay rises for bosses while jobs are cut (see *Eye* 1242) – can be added dinners for himself, Audit Commission chairman Michael O'Higgins and their guests costing £5,264 in 2007/08 alone.

Among Bundred's favourite haunts is L'Escargot in Soho, where he entertained the chairman of the Local Better Regulation Office Clive Grace and – inevitably – the then NAO boss Sir John Bourn for £100 each. And at Coq D'Argent in the City he could be found running up three-figure bills for the taxpayer with former Audit Commission boss Sir Andrew Foster and BBC Trust boss Sir Michael Lyons.

Other venues for Bundred's 25 slap-ups included upmarket eateries Quirinale, Quilon and Incognico with various local government luminaries.

Tax avoider *par excellence* O'Higgins (see *Eye* 1240), meanwhile, preferred Westminster's Quaglino's and Cinnamon Club for his troughing. Taxpayers will be particularly impressed by a £1,687 bill run up at Quaglino's by O'Higgins and a group of his staff and fellow public servants from the Local Government Association; presumably all the meeting rooms back at the office were booked up. Then there was a tasty £574 tab for feeding the leaders of the Council of Mortgage Lenders at Pearl restaurant a couple of weeks before the credit crunch bit.

The junketing wasn't all one way, though. The commission's bosses were amply schmoozed by the usual consultants looking for a slice of the billions spent by local government, with O'Higgins especially open to their advances. PwC escorted him to the Chelsea flower show gala, took him to an unspecified football match, as well as obligatory lunches. From KPMG came a trip to the theatre, while avid outsourcers of public services Fujitsu and Serco could also be found buttering O'Higgins up (dinner and a case of wine respectively).

But even these firms were outdone by the now publicly owned banks, Lloyds taking O'Higgins to Arsenal v Spurs while RBS schmoozed him at Lord's for the England v West Indies Test match and at Twickenham for an England v Wales Six Nations match, plus other lunches.

Worthwhile investments, no doubt, for the banks that make billions from local authority and health spending on PFI.

O'HIGGINS and Bundred are unlikely to brought to book by their Whitehall masters, however, as they too were schmoozed at the taxpayer's expense.

Bundred took Home Office director Helen Kilpatrick to Shepherd's (£106), the then local government secretary Yvette Cooper's special advisers to Bank restaurant (£113) and Peter Housden, Department of Communities and Local Government permanent secretary, to Quilon (£100); while O'Higgins took CLG director Chris Wormald to the Mango Tree (£135). They even squared their likely future bosses: Bundred and Cooper's then Tory shadow, the hungry Eric Pickles, tucking in together at Brasserie Roux (£133).

Tellingly, in contravention of civil service rules, all the mandarins omitted their freebies in the lists of Whitehall hospitality published earlier this year by the Cabinet Office following pressure from the *Eye*, proving that even those extensive lists were not the half of it and that when it comes being schmoozed by vested interests, Whitehall's finest are a law unto themselves.

PRISON NEWS

PRISON governors have found a clever way to make their jails appear calm and well-run when Anne Owers, the chief inspector of prisons, arrives to make one of her detailed reports. They cheat by "ghosting out" all the difficult and disruptive inmates to a nearby jail the day before the inspection and simply ship the troublemakers back in once the inspectors have gone.

No one knows how many jails have been using this trick or for how long, but Ms Owers was tipped off about an inmate swap between two large London jails, Pentonville and Wandsworth, ahead of inspections earlier this year and immediately launched her own investigation. Both jails have received scathing inspection reports in the past, both in terms of poor accommodation and staff attitudes.

When the *Eye* learnt about the scam and asked the Ministry of Justice how widespread it was and how wide-ranging was the inquiry, we were initially told it could not comment beyond a bland statement saying that the Prison Service had commissioned an investigation into information from Ms Owers that prisoners had been "temporarily transferred" between prisons, contrary to policy and accepted practice, and that it was taking the allegations "extremely seriously".

The MoJ then decided to put its own spin on the story and release a press statement to all news outlets, saying the month-long investigation was limited to the two prisons, looking at how many prisoners were moved, who authorised the transfers and why.

However, sources suggest the practice of hiding tricky inmates was not unique to London. The probation union Napo and prison reform groups believe the inquiry should be much wider ranging.

Meanwhile, with the inmate population at an all time high of 84,150, some governors have found novel ways to ease overcrowding.

Even villains given short sentences of just a few weeks are now qualifying for the new end-of-custody licence (ECL) – a jail "discount" of 18 days introduced last June to create space in the creaking system. Thus Napo learnt last week of one inmate, sentenced to 28 days for theft, who was told that he was, like all prisoners (except lifers), entitled to automatic release after serving half his sentence, ie 14 days. But then it was pointed out that he also qualified for ECL – thus he was actually "owed" four days and could leave immediately. Some are even qualifying for the £56 discharge grant. Brilliant!

A ROW has split penal reform groups and charity chiefs after it emerged that two charities have signed up with the security wing of Serco, the service giant, to build and run two new jails in Merseyside and south-east London.

On the one side are those who believe that incarceration, punishment and deterrent of offenders can never be "charitable" aims; and on the other are those, mostly involved in the bids, who believe they can support the "rehabilitation" part of the jail sentence.

One such is Catch 22, a charity that helps troubled young people and is now one of Serco's new prison partners. Catch 22 recently put out two press releases saying that "Prison is not the solution to knife crime" and that "Prevention not prisons will cut youth crime". Which raises the question: why go into the incarceration business?

MINISTERS FOR HIRE

THE NHS has paid Alliance Medical, a private health company linked to former health secretary Alan Milburn, an estimated £15m-£20m over the past five years for 133,000 medical procedures that did not take place.

In July 2004, the then health minister John Hutton gave Alliance a contract to carry out 594,000 MRI scans for the NHS over five years. Alliance was owned by Bridgepoint Capital, an investment firm that hired Hutton's old flatmate Milburn, although the government denied that this relationship influenced the decision. The contract has now ended, and the Department of Health tells *Private Eye* that the firm actually did only 461,000 scans, more than 20 percent less than it was paid for.

As *Private Eye* revealed, Alliance Medical actually proposed the plan for private diagnostic services to the DoH in a 2002 paper. The quality of the company's scans, carried out in the back of specially fitted lorries in hospital car parks, were criticised by many radiologists, and the need for NHS professionals to go over Alliance's work added burdens to hospitals (*Eyes passim*).

A DoH spokesman told the *Eye*: "The introduction of the national magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) service has achieved its aim of reducing waiting times for patients, enabling people to benefit from faster diagnosis and treatment. Over 461,000 scans have been provided and the NHS now has local plans to maintain the substantially shorter waits brought about by the programme." Spending the money on NHS scanners may have been more effective, but less profitable for Alliance. Bridgepoint still partly owns the firm and still employs Alan Milburn.

● *NHS plc Health Check, p29*

EU-phemisms

Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling aren't in power there

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

June 2009: Gordon Brown announces that internet access is "an essential service, as indispensable as electricity, gas and water" and that "we pledge today to give every home, community and company access to broadband internet."

August 2009: Lord Mandelson's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills proposes suspending internet access of those "alleged by rights holders to be infringing copyright" online.

Cost of running Parliament falls
The cost of running the Houses of Parliament fell by more than £30m last year to just below £500, figures show.

BBC Daily E-mail

TV

Shooting Stars (BBC2)

THERE's always a romantic attraction to the idea of the comeback.

Nostalgic sportswriters have spent the summer rhapsodising the dramatic return from retirement of Formula One's Michael Schumacher and the possible recall to the England cricket squad of 40-year-old TV dancing champion Mark Ramprakash. But the second of these dreams never got off the ground and the first was embarrassingly abandoned. BBC executives might have remembered these precedents before agreeing to the return of Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer with **Shooting Stars**, the spoof game-show which was a huge success in the 90s.

It's no surprise that Vic and Bob might have been keen to have another shot because, you sense, their agents may not have been overstretched on their behalf of late. But *Shooting Stars* makes a risky property to dust off because the balance of power within the show has altered so dramatically.

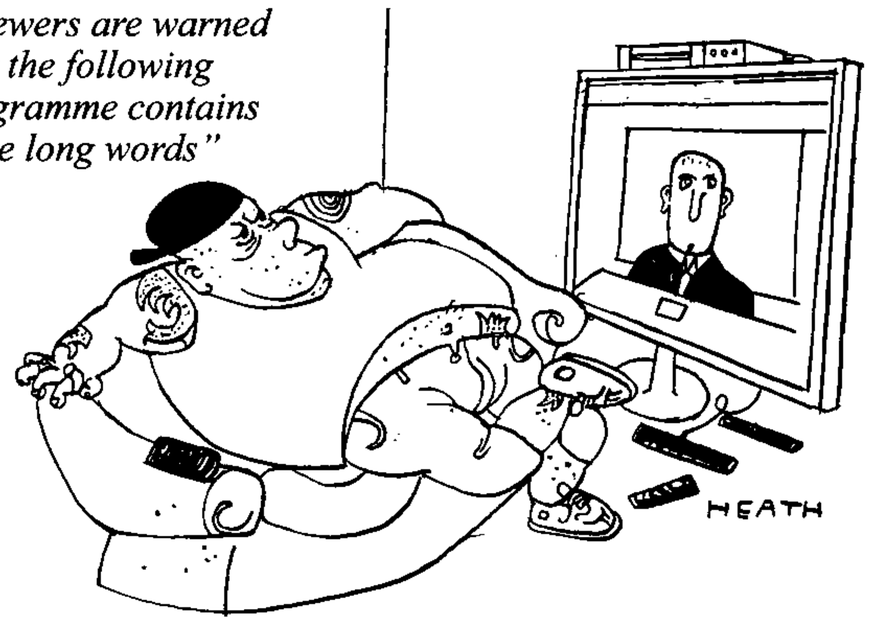
Back in the day, Reeves and Mortimer were the unquestioned guvnors of the format, assisted by the little-known comedian Matt Lucas as the baby-faced scoremaster George Dawes and the fresh and innocent weathercaster Ulrika Jonsson, who could be teased about her friendship with Prince Edward and her general air of fragile unattainability, the joke being that Vic and Bob acted like they might have a chance with her but didn't.

Since *Little Britain*, Lucas is one of the most successful comedians in Britain and really doesn't need this gig but has turned up for the new run, which says a lot about his loyalty and humility but changes the dynamic of the show dramatically by giving the impression that he is doing a favour for two old mates.

In contrast Ulrika – introduced, to please old fans of the show, as "Ulrika-ka-ka" – probably does need the gig but adds a different unease to the proceedings.

The sweet Swedish meteorologist is now known as Sven's mistress, the woman who landed John Leslie in it and, to the tabloids, "4x4", having accumulated children with a quartet of different men. So, while the hosts still moon hopelessly after her, viewers are tempted to think that, if they just hang on, they have a good statistical chance of marrying her. Reflecting these shifts, Mortimer does crude gags about her having got a new set of knockers.

"Viewers are warned that the following programme contains quite long words"



For insurance, the first show imported as a panellist Christine Bleakley, a younger woman with the sort of image now that Ulrika had then, who was subjected to the familiar flirtations, although these seem rather pervy now that the age-gap between the presenters and their target is so much greater. Bleakley was subjected to a particularly gruesome gag, in which Reeves pulled down the back of underpants showing a gruesome skid-mark (props department, hopefully) to reveal a cartoon of *The One Show* he'd drawn in the crack of his bum. A later round introduced the word "apu", purely so that Bleakley could be tricked into saying, "I'll go for apu", allowing Reeves to reply: "Well, make it quick, then."

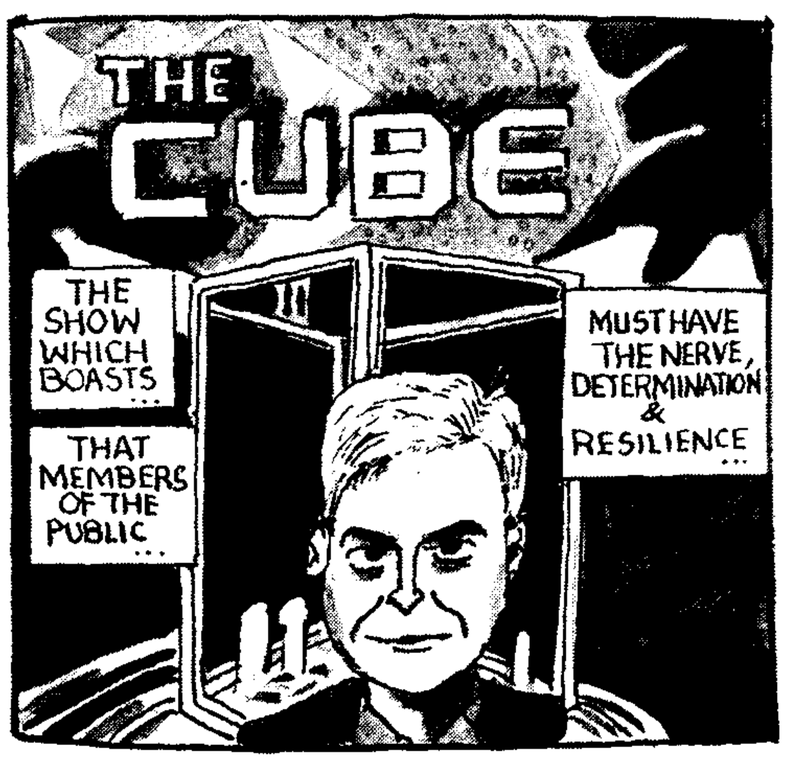
Desperate stuff, but then *Shooting Stars* is one of those irritating series in which, rather than trying to write good or original jokes, the scriptwriters type out bad or old ones and try to pass them off as irony. The boys open with a sort of Morecambe & Wise spoof, a badly-sung song with homo-erotic undertones. There are gags about oriental pronunciation and others as desperate as "What's Amy Winehouse's favourite tube station?" Answer: "High Barnet."

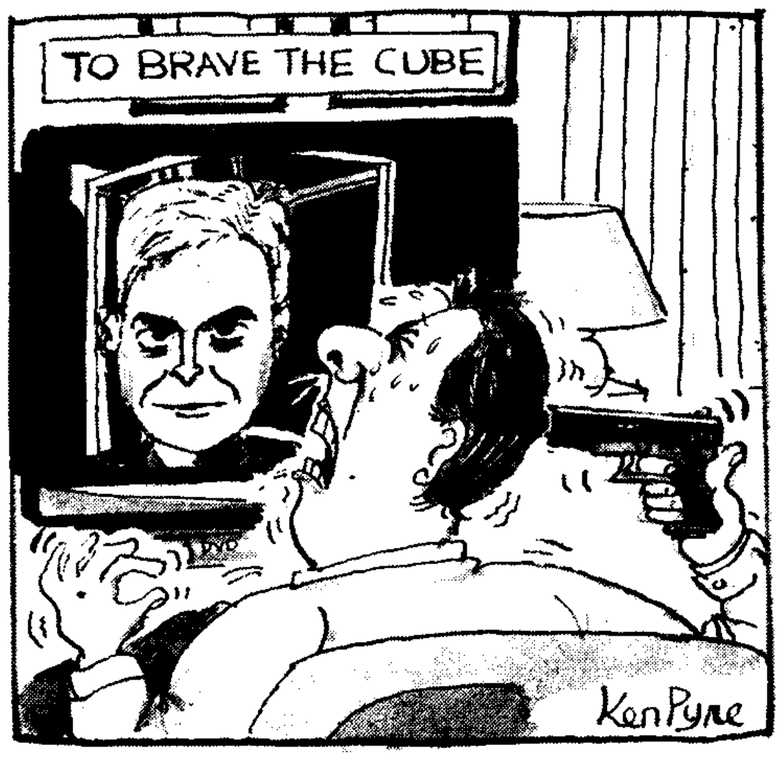
Still, it's possible that some of the audience will have found all of this mildly amusing enough to tune in for episode two, in which case they may soon come to the conclusion that their TV set or iPlayer is playing tricks on them because the second edition is almost indistinguishable from the first.

At best, there are variations on the same jokes, as when Vic and Bob open with another ironically bad homo-erotic song, which at least has slightly different lyrics. Much of the rest, though, is simply repetition: introducing Ulrika, Mortimer again does the ka-ka-ka stuff on the end of the name, which might at least be excused as a historic catchphrase, but then repeats word for word his song from the series opener: "Loving you is easy because your boobs are new."

Indeed, the belief that something which wasn't very funny the first time will become hilarious if you do it often enough seems to be the driving principle of *Shooting Stars*. Comedy has always had catchphrases and running gags but a show consisting almost entirely of them suggests desperation and laziness, as does everything about this unwise resurrection.

'Remote Controller'





MEDIA NEWS

JAMES MURDOCH's instruction that the BBC's alleged monopoly over internet info must be "dealt with" will no doubt be given the fullest consideration by David Cameron and his boss Andy Coulson. But what are the prospects for reform of the existing, 100 percent monopoly over UK commercial radio news?

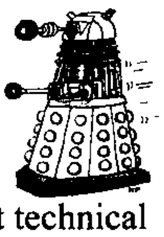
Probably not very high. Earlier this year - without any complaint from the *Times*, *Sun*, *News of the World*, etc – Independent Radio News dropped ITN as its supplier of content (or news, as it used to be called). The once venerable home of stars ranging from Reginald Bosanquet to Anna Ford and Trevor McDonald was undercut by a bid from Sky. As well as delivering another hefty blow to ITN's already shaky finances, Sky's success also meant that it achieved total dominance over the commercial sector.

Community and student radio stations aside, Sky News is now the sole supplier to everyone from British Forces Broadcasting to Classic FM and TalkSport. And this includes the smallest and most remote stations, such as Manx Radio, as well as the larger chains, and even the Guardian Media Group's Real and Smooth networks.

At the moment, this monopoly is merely a touch disconcerting, for so far Sky News has been unable to follow its proprietor's desires and become a clone of Fox News. But were the Conservatives to remove all requirement for fairness from the broadcasting act – as is increasingly likely to be the case – Sky News's audio feed could (and probably would) quickly take on the tone already associated with Fox's NewsTalk service in the US. The difference is that listeners to American commercial radio stations still have a choice of multiple news suppliers.

Criticism of the BBC by both Murdochs is thus hugely hypocritical, but then one of Rupe's favourite axioms is that everyone hates a monopoly… until they own one.

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



"Over the course of the last 6-8 months I have met or been in contact with each of you as part of my work to build up a picture of the MC&A current technical and business process architectures.

"One of the objectives of this work is to build up a set of documents which can act as a starting point for your teams to build from when stating your requirements for the future. This 'collateral' will include a number of process descriptions, models and architectures; an important part of which is the catalogue of the physical systems and applications that you use in your work today."

– Email to BBC Marketing, Communications and Audiences staff

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1

Anne Robinson: In unusual pronunciations, the castle in Leicestershire that is home to the Duke of Rutland has a name that sounds the same as that of which animal?

Contestant: Elephant.

University Challenge, BBC2

Jeremy Paxman: Work this out before you answer. The one-word correct English names of three EU member states end in the suffix "land". Ten points if you can name two of them.

Contestant: Ireland and Swaziland.

Smooth Radio

Mark Goodier: House, Jeeves and Wooster and Peter's Friends all link which British actor?

Caller: Oooh that's Hugh... erm...

MG: Yep, that's it. Not a car or a van but a...?

Caller: Bus?

"Still copying the Beatles, then"

AS IF the BBC didn't have enough genuine complaints from viewers and listeners to worry about, the corporation has decided to send an additional raft of bogus complaints to itself.

As part of a "mystery shopping" exercise, sanctioned by the BBC Trust, "fieldworkers" will send fabricated complaints to programmes made by the BBC and independent production companies "to test primarily the timeliness of response".

Handling complaints, using the new Producer Guidelines, is complicated and time-consuming, involving producers and editors as well as the trust itself. The bogus "test" complaints will be given the same attention by programme makers as genuine complaints – thus ensuring that the whole procedure will now become less timely than is usually the case.

FRESH from buggering up the BBC telephone system, replacing phones that work with ones that don't, Siemens has turned its attention to the BBC's computer system as part of its outsourced £2bn Technology Framework Contract.

An urgent warning email has been "cascaded" to everyone in BBC News: "It appears that Siemens have wrongly released a Desktop update to all News PCs." Instead of building on its "Value for Money" contract, the Siemens update actually "has the potential to render data unusable", thus making it totally unreliable and thus useless in a busy newsroom.

Meanwhile, BBC World Service is shackled with an equally hopeless "Programme Information Tool". It's designed to put radio and TV programmes on to the internet for worldwide audiences, but it crashes so often programmes are unavailable for weeks at a time due to "essential maintenance".

NUMBER CRUNCHING

91 Percentage of those polled who think Jonathan Ross does not deserve £18m to appear on TV

94 Percentage of those polled who think Piers Morgan does not deserve £2m to appear on TV

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Stop sneering at Anne Robinson... If she looks pretty in a photograph, jealous women instantly accuse her of being a freak with another facelift. Or of growing old ungraciously. If she looks anything less than box-fresh, she is called an old crone, or worse. It is so ultra-bitchy."

– Jan Moir, Daily Mail, *Friday 28 August*

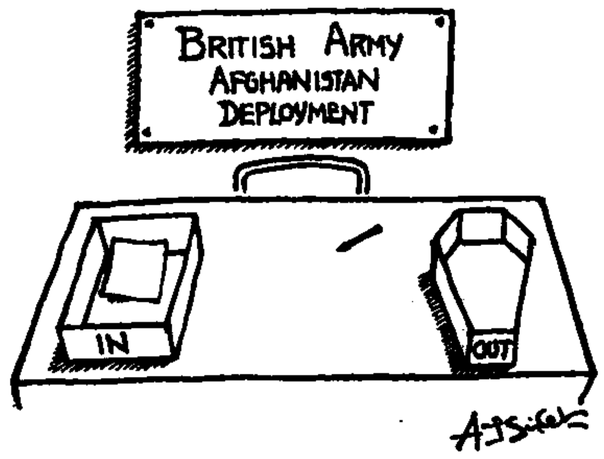
"Oh Anne, why can't you age gracefully?... Anne Robinson sets women an awful example... You don't look prettier, sexier, smarter or younger... Facelifts are stupid and dangerous..."

– Extracts from double page spread by Linda Kelsey trailed on front page of Daily Mail, *Monday 25 August*

NEWS FROM KANDAHAR

FACT-FINDING visits from MPs to British bases in Afghanistan are never popular with the soldiers stationed there.

Whenever MPs appear, there are extra hours of "stag" (guard duty), while female troops and those from ethnic minorities are dragged from their bashas to pose with politicians keen to demonstrate the diversity of the new British army. There's also precious kit to be shown off. Armed forces minister Bill Rammell recently took the wheel of a new Mastiff armoured vehicle for a staged tour of mine-free Camp Bastion, while soldiers on patrol nearby took their chances in less well armoured alternatives.



The latest trip by a cross-party group of 20 MPs turned out to be the least popular of the lot, however. All was fine until the group assembled for the trip home, with seats booked on one of the RAF's few available transport planes.

It was then tempers frayed. Much "vociferous complaining and bitching" ensued, according to one outraged officer, when the group was told that there would be a delay because the RAF was removing seats from "their" aircraft in order to accommodate wounded servicemen for treatment in the UK.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defence itself has proved as unpopular back home as the MPs are in Afghanistan. Supporters of the charities that raise money to pay for medical and social care for wounded soldiers not forthcoming from government are horrified to learn that some of the money they raise goes directly to the MoD instead.

When the Army Benevolent Fund held a musical evening reception in July at Headley Court, the MoD's rehabilitation centre to which the wounded from Afghanistan are sent, the charity was charged £143.75 for "licence preparation". And guests enjoying the Band of the Irish Guards beating retreat – without charging a penny – had to cough up for an extra levy of £1 for the privilege of using the lawn and terrace for a couple of hours – £395 in total.

'Squarebasher'

AD NAUSEAM

THE Ashes produced a glut of player promotion, most of it involving England's talisman Andrew Flintoff. But for timing and placement nothing topped the gaffe by Citizen watches.

Citizen ran a press ad featuring Kevin Pietersen the day after it was announced that, with a serious injury, he would play no further part in the series. The ad's copy? "Unstoppable. Kevin Pietersen is." The curse of the sporting cash-in strikes again!

JOHNNIE WALKER, the whisky brand owned by Diageo, has just posted a six-minute, £300,000 mini-epic film on its website that has adland all a-flutter. Made by BBH it's entitled, "The Man Who Walked Around the World, A True Story," and consists of the Scottish actor Robert Carlyle walking down a winding highland path, telling the tale of how John Walker first started blending whisky and selling it from his small grocer's store in Kilmarnock.

The film consists of a single take (although it took 40 attempts to get right). This is the kind of thing that gets ad creatives excited, as does the sheer brilliance of using the metaphor of walking for a brand called Walker.

But in both its content and its timing the ad could scarcely be more inappropriate. At the beginning of July Diageo announced that it was closing its bottling plant in Kilmarnock, ending an association of 189 years, with the loss of 700 jobs.

The last surviving relative of Johnnie Walker, Betty Heath, told the *Daily Record* that her grandfather would be "turning in his grave. Diageo don't care about the history or about the people who worked their fingers to the bone to help make their huge profits."

Sorry Betty, but Diageo plainly does care about the history of Johnnie Walker – or at least enough to use it for a bit of soul-stirring advertising when it suits.

SHOOTING CASUALTIES

OLYMPIC chiefs never checked how road closures planned for the 2012 Games would affect access to London's accident and emergency departments, according to the city's ambulance service.

After being stonewalled for months about the issue by the Olympic Development Authority, campaigner Albie Fox wrote to the London Ambulance Service NHS Trust asking, under freedom of information law, what impact the use of Woolwich Barracks for shooting events will have on access to the neighbouring Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Head of "patient experiences" Gary Bassett replied that the trust was commissioning its own work to assess the impact of Olympic road closures on emergency response times – before adding that ambulance bosses had "made clear our concerns that evidently no impact assessments were undertaken".

Mr Fox is a spokesman for the Sportsman's Association, which favours moving the shooting events to the national shooting venue at Bisley and creating a lasting legacy, rather than spending £42m on a temporary structure at the barracks which will have to be removed after the Olympics (*Eyes passim*). He said there was still time to move the event, but only if work at Bisley starts soon.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

LONDON FASHION WEEK CELEBRATES 25 YEARS!!!
BRITISH FASHION COUNCIL
AS IT'S A SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY, LET'S HAVE LOTS OF CHAMPAGNE AND DRUGS..... AND MORE CHAMPAGNE!!!.....
SAME AS USUAL THEN!
YUP!

MEDICINE BALLS

Venturing forth

IN which direction will health secretary Andy "Boy" Burnham try to take the NHS?

According to the *Health Service Journal*, his new policy advisor is Kieran Brett, formerly a policy aide to Tony Blair and employed by a consultancy called "The 10 Partnership", which already earns lots of money from the NHS.

Brett advised on a document called *The Venture State*[1], written by 10 Partnership director Michael Macdonnell. It suggests that the poorest sections of society receive services from "venture investments" ensuring "social returns". The venture investments come from the government, with private companies expected to show social returns to get the cash.

There is no definition of a social return, other than to say "new ways of measuring it" are needed. The 10 Partnership would seem to be just the people for the job. Their CEO, Dr David Bennett, was a senior partner at McKinsey for 25 years (motto: "If you can measure it, you can manage it"). And he has very good connections with Andy Burnham's new policy advisor.

Burnham's other health advisor has fewer health credentials. Former GMTV presenter, Katie Myler is the daughter of *News of the World* editor Colin Myler. She doesn't appear to have written any health policy documents but she "knows lots of lobby people in Westminster, including Damian McBride". How reassuring.

Burnham already seems confused about whether he should try to control the NHS from the centre or set it free locally. Bill Moyes, the executive chair of the foundation trust regulator Monitor, recently resigned his post (along with Lord Darzi and Mark Britnell), and issued a parting shot that the government had chickened out of handing control over to hospitals locally, and separating purchasers and providers (something the Tories dabbled with 20 years ago). But he refrained from criticising Burnham, who he hoped was onside.

Devolution was supposed to be the next stage in Labour's NHS plan, but in the spat over American healthcare and the NHS, Burnham stood up for state control and laid into the Tories for being "ambivalent about the role of the centre, preferring localism in health as in other areas". Burnham is clearly reluctant to hand over more money to the NHS without strings attached. What's needed are social returns, and new ways of measuring them.

[1] http://10partnership.com/macdonnellventurestate.pdf

Persistent warts

THE government's decision to choose Cervarix, which protects against cervical cancer, rather than Gardasil, which protects against cancer and genital warts, for the HPV vaccination programme was based on an economic evaluation by the "modelling and economics unit" at the Health Protection Agency, and published in the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ 2008;337:a769).

The contract hinged on the question of how much genital warts cost the NHS, and the authors came up with a figure of £134 "per episode", based on a tiny 2006 study in a small, provincial clinic in York. The true cost is at least £400, and the emotional benefits of preventing warts are also huge, which is why the economic evaluations of most developed countries favoured Gardasil (which also protects against most unpleasant respiratory and laryngeal papillomas).

This costing error has yet to be corrected, although one of the paper's authors, W. John Edmunds, has openly declared that his partner works for GlaxoSmithKline, the manufacturer of Cervarix. On a brighter note, both vaccines are producing excellent protection against the strains of HPV that cause cervical cancer.

M.D.

"It smells of faeces"

SIGNAL FAILURES

sOFT in the head

WHILE consumers are crying out for affordable and joined-up public transport, official policy is still based on failed experiments in free-market economics.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) proposes to refer Britain's deregulated buses to the Competition Commission after realising that a few PLCs have divvied up most of the market between themselves. The OFT also bewails "higher fares in those areas where operators with a strong market position are not challenged by a large, well-resourced rival" and "predatory behaviour" to eliminate competition.

When the Tories deregulated buses outside London in 1986 they assumed private firms would compete, making fares regulation unnecessary. It was soon obvious that a few big firms were swallowing up rivals or forcing them off the road. The OFT sanctioned local monopolies or reacted to predatory behaviour long after the damage was done; but it still clings to the pipedream of sustainable competition between bus firms. Cooperation between companies on tickets or timetables could make buses more attractive to the public – but that has been outlawed as "anti-competitive".

Instead of cutting prices to attract new passengers, greedy PLCs have raised their fares to compensate for people deserting buses for their cars. That pushed yet more people into their cars, triggering more fare rises to maintain profits. Those left on the bus, typically the poor, shouldered more and more of the financial burden. Bus fares rose 17 percent above inflation from 1997 to 2008 while motoring costs fell 13 percent.

Some firms are still stuck in that cycle. In Yorkshire, FirstGroup has responded to the recession by raising bus fares or cutting services, despite transport chiefs warning that that would reduce fare-paying passengers by 5 percent overall (or 10 percent on certain routes).

Many MPs were sceptical when the Tories planned to privatise the railways on the same competition-based model, but were appeased with regulation of some ticket types. Competition between train firms soon proved impossible or against the public interest (see *Eye* 1000 on Ipswich-London rivalry). Labour has preserved the Tories' model and refused to regulate more ticket types although the basis for unregulated fares – competition on the tracks – is absent in most of Britain.

Most train franchises have gone to the big bus firms, so price rises are the knee-jerk response to growing demand in the economic boom (ostensibly to address overcrowding) and to the end of growing demand in the recession. Firms which have raised prices at least once this year won't have any qualms about raising unregulated fares in January to compensate for a 0.4 percent fall in regulated fares (the annual 1 percent increase above July's inflation figure, -1.4 percent this year). WorstGroup can't even wait till January: some First Great Western fares will leap 21 percent this Sunday.

MEMBERS of the Barking-Gospel Oak Line User Group (north London) were so surprised that their trains wouldn't have to be replaced by buses on bank-holiday Monday they issued a press release urging locals to "take advantage".

Virgin Trains issued a similar message on the west-coast mainline, which transport secretary Andrew Adonis "officially opened" in May after the line had been "completely overhauled" at a cost of £9bn. Virgin encouraged people to spend the holiday weekend in the UK and "use the train wherever possible".

Alas, Network Rail engineers shut the west-coast line in several places that weekend. Virgin managed just one train per hour from London (diverted via Leamington), no trains between London and north Wales, and replacement buses from Milton Keynes-Birmingham International, Crewe-Liverpool and Crewe-Warrington. Another Virgin press release described the challenge for Warrington rugby fans travelling to Wembley on Saturday: "There will be no direct train services, journey times will be considerably longer than usual, and there is no guarantee that anyone travelling with Virgin Trains will arrive in time for the start of the match."

'Dr B Ching'

ECO GNOMICS

Paper-thin promises

KIMBERLY-CLARK, the paper giant that makes brands including Andrex and Kleenex, agreed last month to a series of measures that won praise from Greenpeace and succeeded in securing an end to a long-running boycott against the company.

Its new environmental programme includes increasing the use of recycled paper, ambitious targets for fibre sources from certified sustainable forests and, most importantly, pulling out of all areas of the old growth North American Boreal forest that cannot be certified as sustainable. The general reaction has been positive, and Greenpeace has even asked members to thank Kimberly-Clark for changing its policy.

However, other big multinationals continue to plunder from high conservation value old-growth forests and other big paper users have so far failed to commit to positive measures. Greenpeace is likely to turn up the heat on them significantly now that it can cite Kimberly-Clark as an example of what is possible.

Proctor & Gamble, which makes much of its green record, now appears to be a prime target for campaigners' wrath in the months ahead, having failed for many years to implement more forest-friendly policies. Perhaps this year's Green Awards will provide a platform to reward companies like Kimberly-Clark while switching the focus on to laggards like Proctor & Gamble. After all, the awards claim to "illustrate the crucial role that needs to be played by green marketing and sustainability communications in informing people about green issues, products and lifestyle choices, and showcase examples of excellence and best practice in communicating sustainability".

The awards boast a "judging panel of 25 sustainability and communication heavy-weights... pushing the standards of green marketing". But perhaps we shouldn't get too excited. For despite the company's record in sourcing from old growth forests, the chairman of these "heavyweights" is none other than Peter White – the "global sustainability" director at... Proctor & Gamble!

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

TO CRAPIT-ALL

THE cost of Birmingham city council's new website has rocketed by 383 percent in just four years. So regular *Eye* readers will not be surprised to learn that it is being developed by... Crapita!

Originally the firm said the website would be up and running in March 2006 and would cost no more than £580,000. But documents show that Crapita then told Birmingham that if it wanted its new all-singing, all-dancing website it would have to cough-up a further £1.6m, bringing the total cost to £2.2m.

Crapita then demanded another £631,000 for "unforeseen" costs, making a grand total of £2.8m. The council says the website will go live later this month, three years and five months late. Especially galling for hard-pressed council taxpayers, the website was meant to underpin the council's "Business Transformation Project", to save the council £1bn over 10 years (see *Eye* 1203).

In Surrey, meanwhile, the Capita Symonds consultancy has been helping Elmbridge borough council to botch its attempt to build 38 high-density homes on the site of a former swimming pool.Tory councillors John and Mary Sheldon, who were spearheading the scheme, first sought to obtain planning permission and sell the council land to developers in 2008. But fierce opposition forced the council to reject its own first planning application.

Capita's role was to show that the new homes would have little impact on local traffic flow – a task it accomplished by surveying the area during February half term when the streets were at their quietest. When Elmbridge filed its second application, Capita claimed to have repeated the work – though curiously, that second survey, dated September, found exactly the same number of cars, in the same streets, in the same positions as in February. Shurely shome mishtake?

Contacted by the *Eye*, the council claimed that the February work never took place, and that the documents were filed "by accident". As the council awarded itself permission last week, it finally shrugged-off any pretence of propriety. The Sheldons dismissed criticism of the application from a leading independent planning counsel, rejected all questions they considered too searching, before eventually yelling "Nimby" at dissenters in the public gallery.

● **DONCASTER's elected mayor Peter Davies, who swept to power on a promise to root out "political correctness", got off to a flying start, bringing in hot shot experts Laura and John Midgley, from the Campaign Against Political Correctness, to run a fine-tooth comb through the council last month. The Midgleys set about their task with vigour, winning plaudits from the *Daily Mail* for discovering "plenty of examples where expensive political correctness takes place in Doncaster, like the Ethnic Minority Welfare Rights Service." This was, said John Midgley, "the sort of divide and rule policy that is outdated not only in Doncaster but in the country as a whole." Perhaps that's why, as Donny MD Paul Hart conceded this week, the service was scrapped *three years ago*.**

LOUSE PRICES UP

INFLATION is going through the roof in Salford, where the council recently declared that it would cost "up to £130,000" per property to refurbish terraced houses in the Top Streets area of Higher Broughton.

Only two years ago the figure to do up the same houses, given via the prime minister himself as part of the infamous government Pathfinder initiative, was estimated at below £70,000. And back in 2001 Salford council estimated repair costs per terrace as below £25,000 to give them a "long term life".

The ridiculously high figure has been used, of course, to rat on a decision taken back in 2006 by Salford's lead member for housing services to "retain, remodel and refurbish" 15 houses in the Top Streets. Residents have now been told that the plan is "unviable" and their houses will be bulldozed, to which some have responded by slapping an injunction against Salford council.

Meanwhile those hundreds of families who have already had their houses taken from them in Higher Broughton will be cheered to learn the results of a lands tribunal last month. The tribunal found that the independent district valuer used by Salford to provide "expert valuation evidence" had undervalued a CPO'd property in the area by more than 40 percent.

POOL SNOOKERED

SO. Farewell then Coseley Baths, as Dudley council brings in the bulldozers – even if it has to get a loan to cover the cost of demolition.

The pool closed at the end of August after the council refused to pay for "urgent repairs" to make the roof safe and keep the baths open. Campaigners say the roof problems have been known for years and the council has not even bid for grants that could have been used to repair it.

A decision report from Cllr David Stanley, cabinet member for environment and culture, says the building will now be "decommissioned and demolished as soon as practicable" even though there is "no specific budget for the demolition costs" – likely to be in six figures. The report says the work could be funded out of the land sale or from "prudential funding" (ie a loan).

The pool was home to two swimming clubs and a diving club, in a borough where 55 percent of adults are overweight or obese, and it provided swimming lessons for several schools.

Dudley council's ingenious solution includes telling Coseley's swimmers to go for a dip in Bilston's lovely new Urban Village leisure centre instead. As Bilston is in the neighbouring borough of Wolverhampton, this wheeze won't cost the council a penny. However, as the Urban Village scheme has hit numerous snags and the new pool won't be ready for at least another 18 months, the Save Coseley Baths action committee are unimpressed.

And, to rub chlorine into the wound, swimmers who were turned away from overcrowded Dudley swimming pool this summer were recommended by staff to, er, go to Coseley Baths instead!

A RADIOACTIVE RAT

THREE councils in Somerset face a tricky conflict-of-interest after agreeing to take £1m from an energy company hoping to build a new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point, beside the Bristol Channel.

Somerset county council, Sedgemoor district council and West Somerset council will walk away with gently glowing piles of moolah from *Eye* favourites EdF, in exchange for carrying out studies into the "impact" of the proposed power station. Their reports will form part of EdF's planning application to the government's new infrastructure planning commission.

Anti-nuclear campaigners smell a radioactive rat. To allay locals' fears, the councils have promised "transparency". But their agreement with EdF contains legally-binding clauses which compromise the councils' ability to be transparent. One allows EdF to "clearly identify... information that it considers should not be disclosed by the councils... under the Freedom of Information Act" while another compels the councils to "consult [EdF] prior to the release of any requested information".

Somerset county council's commitment to transparency has already been found wanting. When an *Eye* contributor requested information about the new nuke site in May, an SCC officer threatened to declare him a "vexatious" user of FoI laws – a rule that would enable the council to ignore any future requests – even though he had made just three requests for information about nuclear power in two years.

Legal News

PLENTY of journalists have been caught out relying on Wikipedia for their fact-checking, but it's alarming to find a legal judgment citing the online encyclopaedia as a reference for medical information.

Lord Woolman's decision in a case to decide compensation for a man seriously injured in a head-on collision with a stolen van was recently posted online by the Scottish courts service. In the third paragraph of that decision, the words "traumatic head injury" are helpfully hyperlinked to... the Wikipedia page on traumatic head injury.

Judicial information officer Elizabeth Cutting told the *Eye* that the link had not been intended to appear in the published decision. She said Lord Woolman had consulted Wikipedia "in order to ensure that the terminology which he used in his judgment was accessible to the non-specialist" rather than to supplement the evidence he had heard about brain injury during the case.

Scots law blogger Jonathan Mitchell QC said the use of internet links in online reported decisions would be welcome, if they took readers to proper authorities, such as other case law or legislation, but that the use of Wikipedia (where information can be easily subject to mischief and sabotage – see *Eyes passim*) was "highly questionable".

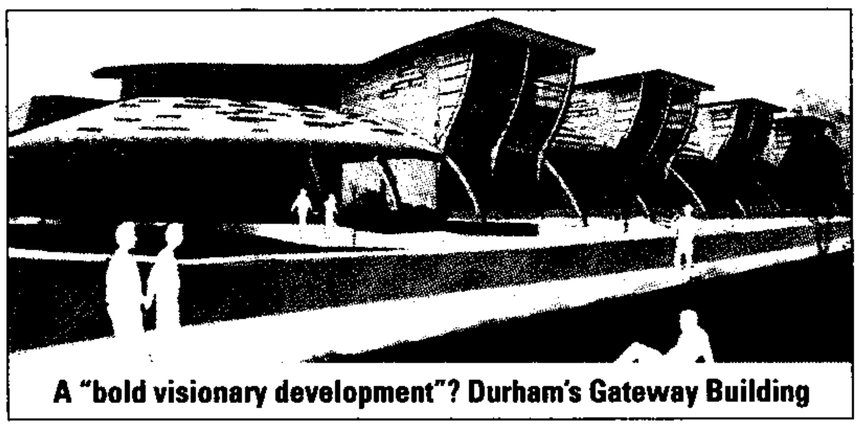
IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER

THESE ADVERTS ARE, IN MANY WAYS, A FASCINATING SOCIAL INDICATOR...
THE CHANGING FACE OF BRITAIN CAUGHT IN THE EPHEMERAL NOTICE: "MAN WITH VAN", "CHILDMINDER, "FLAT SHARE"...
AND THOSE CLASSIC ISLINGTON EVERGREENS: "ORGANIC ALLOTMENT HARVESTER", "FELINE MASSAGE SPECIALIST..."
AND A PERSONAL FAVOURITE: THE "UNUSUAL BOWEL MOVEMENT AWARENESS GROUP"

NOOKS and CORNERS

MORE on the need of our universities to have a brand-new iconic landmark "gateway" building. Oxford Brookes wants to build one on top of Headington Hill, to the outrage of local residents (*Eye* 1238). And there is now similar disquiet at Durham University's £48m project to erect a Gateway Building, "a bold visionary development", in Elvet next to the Science Site in Stockton Road, south of the historic city centre.

This will contain a "state-of-the-art student services facility" and will be "a prestigious HQ building for the University" (the University administration is currently in the 1890s Old Shire Hall). The new building will also contain the Law School and the main university library in Stockton Road will be expanded to house the law library. This will allow the reconfiguration of the Palace Green Library, which is linked to the creation of a World Heritage Site visitor centre. It all fits in nicely with the Durham City Visions project to make a "vibrant city centre economy".



A "bold visionary development"? Durham's Gateway Building

No doubt much of this is necessary, but why does the new building have to be so big and prominent? The vice-chancellor, Professor Chris Higgins, insists: "The Gateway will be a landmark building for the university and the city, creating a sense of arrival for students, staff and visitors". But why? At present, the inescapable, inspiring landmark that greets most visitors to the historic core of the university (founded 1832) is a very large and famous old building with three whopping towers called, er, Durham Cathedral.

Until now the university has been largely successful in introducing new buildings among the old. And as the Elvet Residents' Association observes, the approaches into Durham "are still largely characterised by their greenness due in large part to the tree planting carried out by previous generations. In the past this has been respected and enhanced by the university but this development will completely destroy this character."

The destruction has begun, even though the university has yet to apply for, let alone be granted, planning permission. Though the university claims to be consulting locals over their fears, it is already chopping down trees in Stockton Road, opposite what is still a low-density Victorian residential area. And the overweening four-storey new building will come right up to the road.

The design itself includes every possible fashionable wobbly or bulbous architectural *cliché*. This visionary concept is due to the PH Partnership of Gateshead working with a whizzy dynamic practice called _space group (note the modish cybernetic typography). This firm used merely to be called Waring & Netts of Newcastle, specialists in social housing and supermarkets, until it thought laterally and decided to be "a big family of built environmental businesses".

Apart from the vice-chancellor, nobody has a good word to say about this fatuous, rebarbative monster. English Heritage is unhappy and two distinguished architect patrons of the Durham City Trust, Sir William Whitfield and Sherban Cantacuzino, have both written to Prof Higgins to express concern. It is rumoured that even CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) is repelled by the design, although it will not make a public statement until planning permission is applied for. If Durham University really has to go ahead with this development, it might consider hiring a decent architect and being rather more tactful and modest in scale – but that, of course, might not accord with the vice-chancellor's vaunting ambition.

ANOTHER wretched "Gateway" is, of course, the Thames Estuary, where Gravesham council in north Kent continues to behave badly (*Eyes *1223 & 1229). Against the advice of its conservation and planning officers and contrary to the council's own policies as well as the national planning policy guidance, PPG 15, and despite the opposition of SAVE Britain's Heritage, the Victorian Society and local residents, it has granted consent for the demolition of the former Milton Congregational Church in Clarence Place in Gravesend, which stands in a conservation area. The building, of 1872, is not listed, but it was an early work by Sir John Sulman, who later achieved fame in Australia as an architect and town-planner.

The Gravesend church is in good condition and is in use as a Sikh Temple, the Siri Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara. Unfortunately, some of the elders have decided to build a new temple and to pay for it by redeveloping the site in Clarence Place (the builder will be the son of the President of the New Temple). However, SAVE has challenged the legality of the council's grant of consent, has secured a temporary injunction to prevent demolition and is applying for judicial review. Furthermore, many of the Sikhs are unhappy, and one member of the congregation has written to SAVE that the existing temple "is a tremendous building. Our problem is that the elder generation have very little concept of conservation and heritage, and like the building firms are only interested in maximum financial profit. I think this is immoral and selfish. There are great many Sikhs, like myself, who believe that the Gurdwara should NOT be demolished… Thank you for championing this project on behalf of all sensible British people." Quite.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

I-SPY *Inverary, Scotland.*

Submitted by James Brown. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

INTERNATIONAL vilification as a soft touch for convicted terrorists is bad enough; but how long before Scotland recovers from the humiliation of being beaten into fourth place in the world bagpipe championships?

When this venerable competition took place in Glasgow last month, bands from the home of the pibroch were beaten by (among others) a pipe band from, er, British Columbia.

This was the fourth year running that Scottish pipers failed to cover themselves with any vestige of glory; and overall they have lost the competition eight times out of the last ten. Needless to say the pipers blame everything imaginable for their poor run – lack of funding, lack of educational resources, climate change directing chill winds up the kilt, etc. As the principal of the Glasgow-based College of Piping puts it, it's "a hellish state of affairs".

PS: Funnily enough, given Scotland's cordial new relationship with certain Arab states, the pipes are increasingly popular in parts of the Middle East. The Sultan of Oman, for instance, is devoted to them (a legacy from his student days at Sandhurst, apparently) and is woken daily by the droning wail of palm-fringed variants on Will Ye Noo Come Back Again? and other tartan classics. He is said to reward his better players with new motor cars.

ACCORDING to researchers at Carnegie Mellon and Stanford universities in the US, downloading music from the internet is environmentally more responsible than buying CDs.

Taking manufacture, packaging and transport into account, they calculate that the average download involves between 40 percent and 80 percent less carbon emission than the average purchase.

Downloaders (legal or otherwise) aren't the only ones helping to make the music industry greener, however. The world of British country-house opera is doing its bit too.

West Green House, the charming opera venue in Hampshire, has a comparably charming scheme advertised in its programme as the "Green Gym" – an invitation to patrons to improve their health without the dreary burden of joining an expensive gym. How is this to be achieved? Er, by volunteering to work shifts manuring, weeding and watering the West Green gardens. Or as West Green calls it: "Supervised aerobic exercise".

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Spoons
This is an exhibition of spoons made by artists working in various disciplines.
Artmag

Letters

Who Katie did next

Sir,

I see that Peter Andre claims to be "devastated" by photographs of his estranged wife Katie Price indulging in a public heavy petting session with another man just weeks after their split. I wonder if you have any photographs of such an incident in your files that would help readers empathise with Mr Andre's pain?

Yours faithfully,
ENA B. JORDAN,
London W1.

Ouch!

Sir,

It seems from your Sky HD story (Media News, Eye 1243) that you disapprove of Sky giving benefits to new customers that are not available to existing loyal customers. So I was amused to see you offering three free issues of the Eye to new subscribers only in your ad near the back of the same issue. If and when you reach a consistent position on this marketing gimmick, perhaps you would be kind enough to add my three free issues at the end of my current subscription. Or not, as the case may be.

Regards,
NORMAN FOSTER,
Cambridge.

Letts be 'avin' you

Sir,

Loath though I am to defend any politician, far less Milords Sugar and Martin (Ratbiter, Eye 1243), I always thought free speech meant the right to express strong opinions or facts, however awkward.

But Gerald Campion lookalike Quentin Letts [of the Daily Mail] has been far too fond recently of confusing this right with downright personal abuse – and when he does resort to pure insult, he must take his chance in the law courts like any other citizen.

Yours aye,
FRANK MORGAN,
Via email.

Free Megrahi

Sir,

"Libyan takeaway" (In the Back, Eye 1243) rightly concluded: "We have all been denied the full truth about Lockerbie." So why are you behaving like a greedy banker by charging £5 to download Paul Foot's special report written in 2001 when the original hard copy cost me £1.50. Whatever you think of Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill's decision to release Megrahi, this is an opportune moment to offer a free download and maximise circulation of the most robust account of Lockerbie to date.

Regards,
GAVIN HERON,
Glasgow.

PS: You really should be embarrassed when a Scotsman thinks you are a tight bastard.

● Paul Foot's 2001 special report, *Lockerbie – The Flight from Justice*, is available free for Eye subscribers to download at www.private-eye.co.uk. (It's £5 to everyone else.)

Lockerbie remembered

Sir,

Your article "Libyan Takeaway" (Eye 1243) states that the UN observer at the trial in the Netherlands and some of the British victims' families believe there has been a miscarriage of justice. The article, however, makes it clear that there was a perversion, not a miscarriage, of justice. The late Paul Foot's special report gives it much greater detail.

Can we not call a spade a spade rather than a garden implement? A perversion of justice or a stitch-up – either will do.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN MALONEY,
London N4.

Sir,

Re Hack of the week (Street of Shame, Eye 1243). As someone who actually was at Lockerbie immediately after the disaster as part of the RAF detachment from RAF Leeming – I was the military comms coordinator during the three days there. I helped lead a large team on body searches. I can honestly say the experience changed me for ever. And yes:

We did find toys, Christmas presents, clothes and personal belongings too. We marked them for later collection.

We witnessed the camera teams from the media pulling back the shrouds that covered the dead and filming them.

We witnessed looting.

We witnessed the hogging of the only operating phone line out of Lockerbie, by the media, which was needed by us to get additional equipment.

We witnessed the shameful and frankly barbaric media frenzy when the relatives arrived for counselling – led by the American camera crews. I marvel that our troops showed professionalism of the highest order and stayed calm.

I am continually depressed by these kind of comments that hacks like Nick Cohen trot out at the drop of a hat! Show some humility and humanity, gentlemen! "Normal" people find this magnitude of disaster traumatic, and I use the term accurately and not in its degraded form through continual use. I have spent years and struggled mightily to overcome the trauma I suffered, the wounds are still raw, so I can really do without flippant remarks of this kind, from anybody.

I'd love to know who the "sophisticated reporters" are, but surely this is a misnomer or even mutually exclusive?

End of rant – love your organ and will continue with the subscription.

Kind regards,
JOHN McHUGH,
Via email.

Tigers tamed

Sir,

I found the Letter from Colombo in Eye 1243 to be yet another nasty campaign to smear Sri Lanka and its government and to be a most offensive piece. It was largely a personal smear campaign against the best president that Sri Lanka has ever had.

The author of this missive is, as usual, given as being from your "Own Correspondent" but the whole article has the stamp of a Tamil Tiger supporter in the UK.

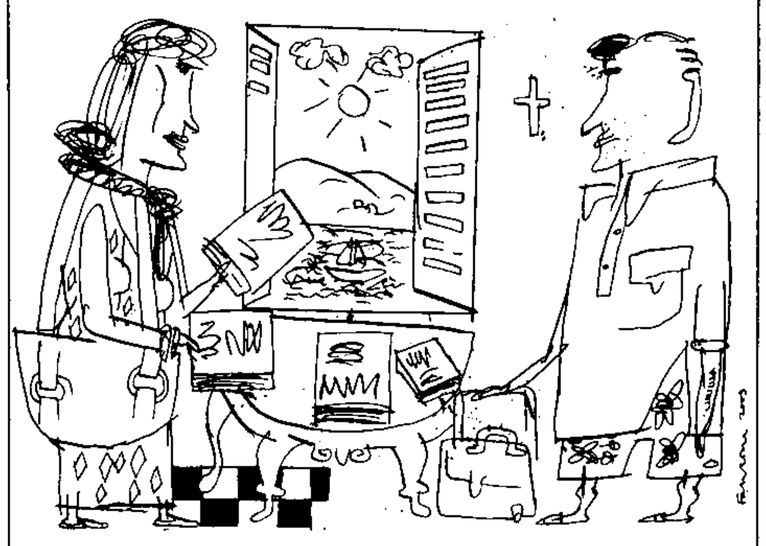
I particularly take issue with his statement: "... and the mass graves of a rumoured 40,000 civillians killed by the army in the last weeks of the war". This is a doubling of even the Times of London's ludicrous and wholly unproven statement of 20,000 at the end of May. No mention of how many innocent civilians were killed by the Tigers or the use of them as human shields in the dying days of the war; it was all the army's doing of course!

Why oh why do western governments, the BBC and Channel Four seek to back the Tamil Tigers when they were one of the most murderous terrorist groups ever? Tigers and weaponry are still being unearthed and seized in Sri Lanka regularly, and it will take that lovely island some years yet to get back to normal.

Articles such as your Letter from Colombo are clearly either written by one of the Tamil diaspora or someone who has swallowed their propaganda whole. No reader should take it at face value.

Sincerely,
GEORGE HODGES,
Bedford.

Scenes You Seldom See



"I know these books are only holiday reading but I'm certainly not leaving them behind"

Plodding pagans

Sir,

*As founder of the Public Bodies Liaison Committee for British Paganism (Pebble), I feel I should protest at the Police Log (Eye 1243) portrayal of Police Pagan Association members consisting of Warlocks (not a Pagan title) worshipping Beelzebub (Pagans don't) and sacrificing animals (we don't do that either). But, although I feel I should protest, it was very, very funny and we pagans generally enjoy having the p*** taken out of us – we do it to each other all the time anyway. And, besides that, you published my letter about Ruskin in the same issue.*

Yours as always,
STEVE WILSON,
London E6.

Black spot

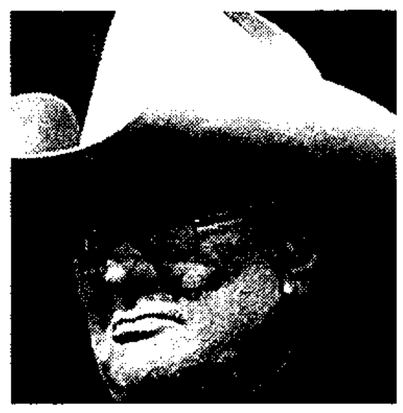
Sir,

Re Funny Old World, Eye 1243. I was surprised that you published the story of wealthy passengers paying for the chance to kill Somali pirates from their cruise ship. It's total fiction, as a brief internet search would have told you (http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/hoaxes/piratecruise.asp).

Shame on you!

ARNOLD J. MATTHEWS,
Via email.

Lookalike



Churchill

Curtis

Sir,

Is this indeed Tony Curtis, the well-known Hollywood star of yesteryear, or a rare photo of our very own Winston Churchill in a Stetson?

DAVE HOWELL,
Via email.

Close call?

Sir,

Whilst reading your review of "Twenties Girl" by Sophie Kinsella (Literary Review, Eye 1243), a novel about a young woman harried by the ghost of a 1920s Charleston-dancing flapper with hilarious consequences, I was put in mind of "Maxie", the 1985 film starring Glenn Close, about a girl harried by the ghost of...

Coincidence? Tell me now, or the bunny gets it.

Yours,
ADRIAN JOHNSON,

Via email.

Hacking backing

Sir,

The assertion that Gary McKinnon was being used by a Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS) is illogical and unsupported by evidence (Sqn Ldr Bennett – Hacker's Backers, Letters, Eye 1243). Firstly, you rarely need the resources of a FIS to break into allegedly secure networks from the internet, and you certainly didn't need them when McKinnon was doing his thing. Back in 2001, most security was done "through obscurity", rather than by building in effective access controls, secure hardware/software and detection/prevention mechanisms. As an IT security professional, I come across many published instances of such breaches, and there are a whole load more that remain undisclosed. Try Googling "SCADA hacking" for some scary stuff.

Secondly, why on Earth would a FIS want to use someone like McKinnon to hack NASA's systems? There is no shortage of locally available, skilled and willing hackers who will make a proper effort to cover their tracks, and who would never take the sort of risks of getting caught that McKinnon took. In short, he would be a liability to any FIS. The great thing about the internet from a FIS perspective is that you can hack from anywhere in the world, and pretend to be somewhere or someone else. McKinnon, whilst obviously competent, is probably no uberhacker. The best ones hardly ever get caught.

The US authorities want to make an example of McKinnon in order to deter other hackers, and are perpetrating the myth that McKinnon is so skilled and highly dangerous in order to divert the blame from their own, very obvious, security failings. They have previous "form" on this in the shape of Kevin Mitnick, the US hacker who was only released from prison, after five years in 2003, on condition that he never used the internet again, such is their fear of someone who, in fact operated more by using soft deception skills than hardcore hacking.

We'd be better off if McKinnon was given a year or two custodial sentence as a deterrent to others, and then, if he's any good, taking him on as a security specialist. All recreational hackers are obsessive; some are aspergic, but they aren't usually bad people, and many have been "turned" to good effect.

Regards,
TONY TROY,

Via email.

Vince beef

Sir,

In the ongoing Twickenham saga of the council's wish to impose a block of luxury flats on a riverside site it owns against the wishes of the locals, the usually saintly, in some eyes, Dr Vince Cable, the local MP, has chickened out of offering his constituents any assistance. His reason? It is just "a matter for the council".

Having served on the borough's planning committee for the last seven years, I am amazed. Is this the same Dr Chicken whose name regularly appears on planning agendas, usually opposing applications?

Yours faithfully,
RODNEY BENNETT,

Cllr, Richmond upon Thames.

My Lai of the land

Sir,

Massive numbers of innocent civilians murdered. Life imprisonment quietly reduced to three years. Outrage at the travesty of justice. Oh yes, that was Lt Calley, guilty of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam.

We in the UK refuse to take any of this nonsense from Americans, who seem to have very short memories. Appalled at the hypocrisy.

Sincerely,
NIGEL CHEFFERS-HEARD,

Topsham, Exeter.

Lookalike

Comic

General

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the distinct similarity between General Stan McChrystal, NATO commander in Afghanistan, and Paul Elliot of the popular comedy duo the Chuckle Brothers. Are they related?

PAUL MOONEY,

Norfolk.

Anagram

Sir,

The South African women's 800-metre world champion is currently facing a "gender test" after her performance in Berlin. Surely this is unnecessary? After all, the clue is in her name...

Caster Semenya = YES! A SECRET MAN!

ENA B. MANN (no relation),

London.

Mike Giggler writes...

Sir,

I am concerned that the normally high standards of the Eye are slipping. In the Back on beer (Eye 1243) correctly identifies the mass ranks of CAMRA members as sandal wearers but entirely overlooks the mandatory beard.

Regards,
KEITH FLETT
(CAMRA member 19090),

London N17.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He tried to cut off his nose in spite of his face."

MATTHEW HAYDEN, TMS
(Ian Scott)

"We mustn't sit on our laurels..."

MIKE GATTING, Radio 4
(Rev Clifford Hughes)

"Andy Johnson was literally banjoed out of the game by a player who made no attempt to win the ball."

Fulham Manager ROY HODGSON
(Steve Boyd)

"There's no one to blame – they are just individual mistakes."

DAVID BECKHAM
(David Thorne)

"Gee, he looks like Moses. Where's his Ark?"

DEAN JONES, TMS
(Bob Oldroyd)

Pedantry Corner

... Re Desperate Romantics (Dru Masters' letter, Eye 1243). It's "thou dost protest too much", not "you doth". I do, thou dost, he doth, we/you/they do. Same with have, hast, hath. However I agree that DR is tremendous fun. I'm enjoying it almost as much as "Rome", about which the critics were equally sniffy.

SUSAN HARVEY.

... I wish to lock horns with R.M. Cameron (Pedantry Corner, Eye 1243) over the Latin origins of coruscate. According to my 1918 edition of Cassell's Latin dictionary, the Latin word corusco is derived from the Greek word "korusso" and means "to butt with horns". By extension, it also means "to move quickly and shake also flutter [birds' wings] and to shine, flash and glitter". Similarly, coruscos is translated in the same edition as "shaking, trembling, gleaming and flashing".

DR PHILIP F. ROBERTS.

... Your number crunching box on deaths due to swine flu and deaths due to malaria (1243) is somewhat moronic. Clearly none of you have even bothered to read into the reasons why a malaria vaccine will "take some years", and a swine flu vaccine is "being rushed out". The Malaria pathogens (various Plasmodium species), have ingenious "smoke screen" immune evasion tactics, along with a multitude of strain types and a number of species. No vaccine thus far developed has been successful because of this..

Perhaps in the future, Private Eye will rail against researchers not curing cancer when they can oh so easily cure stomach ulcers.

TOM KARACS.

... A propos the front page of "The Daily Chain Mail" (Eye 1243), 21 August 1346 was not a Friday. It was a Monday.

STEPHEN CUTLER.

... Re Mike Barfield's Bash Street Kids Friends Reunited (Eye 1243), the little boy with the owl spectacles – to whom, as a glasses wearer myself, I always related – was called Herbert, not Cedric.

ANDY CONNELL.

... In Prime Ministerial Decree No. 51, Comrade Lord Mandelson refers to "an old people's home on the Isle of Muck in the Outer Hebrides".

*His Lordship then comments "What nonsense this is!" Too true: Muck, although Outer Hebridean in character, is one of the **Inner** Hebrides, as anyone who has ventured North of Watford ought to know.*

KEITH FARR.

... Your sub-editors need to amend the in-house style guide in respect of forms of address for Anglican clergy and Free Church Ministers (see "God and Mammon", Rotten Boroughs, Eye 1243). The Revd J.C. Flannel is correct' the Revd Flannel is not. If you're using surnames only, then it is Mr/Ms/Mrs/Miss Flannel. I blame "Cluedo" and the candlestick-wielding Rev Green for the increasing frequency of this distressing solecism.

I will not be cancelling my subscription to your illustrious organ.

THE REVD JOHN SWARBRICK.

Letter from **Hargeisa**

from Our Own Correspondent

IMAGINE, just a camel ride away from the cauldron of violence, creeping Islamism and dodgy American activity that is Somalia, a country with the same language, people, culture and religion.

Somaliland is the only place in the Horn of Africa that is democratic, stable and tolerant. Yet because of misplaced fears of the mushrooming of micro-states, we remain unrecognised by the international community, 18 years after declaring our independence. As a result, the world keeps us at arm's length and has instead forced on us consultants so greedy and inept that the very peace we now enjoy is under threat.

Elections in an impoverished, nomadic society are never easy, but our record of closely contested polls compares pretty well with our neighbours. Our friends faraway nevertheless thought that what we really needed was a state of the art biometric finger printing and facial recognition system to compile a voter's roll. But an operation of such complexity – not to mention the $10m funding – could not possibly be trusted to us natives.

So step forward Interpeace, an organisation with a colourful financial record of its own. Interpeace was formerly called WSP International, and was a UN agency before being outsourced. So good is it that there was no need for a tender. Jerry McCann, its creative genius, immediately subcontracted the IT work to a company only just set up, Copenhagen Elections, which in turn subcontracted to Creative Associates of Washington – ex-UN people, who have worked with Interpeace in the past – the role of "independent" assessor.

Alas, this model of donor co-operation has somewhat underperformed. Presidential elections have been postponed four times now and are 18 months late, and now we have the prospect of civil war as our politicians cannot agree on a way forward. The Interpeace representative, Reubens Zamorra, has been expelled for leaking information, the voter list is unusable, and Interpeace and the donors, including our old colonial masters in London, have masterfully passed the buck.

How could anyone have imagined that nomadic people would have had such problems abandoning a cultural aversion to finger-printing? And who would not have been as surprised as Interpeace to discover that in this desert country, sandy conditions take their toll on even the cleverest technology. So the perfect election remained elusive and donors fell out with Jama Omar, the chairman of our National Electoral Commission, after his absurd suggestions of incompetence and corruption.

Patience has been running thin. Interpeace said we should use the incomplete electoral list, or agree another delay. President Dahir Rayaale, who has probably benefited politically from the delays, has had enough. He expelled our expert advisers and wants elections at the end of September. Our two opposition parties say they will not participate.

Britain and the US, with their unblemished record at delivering democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan, are now walking away from this car crash and blame Rayaale, something of a soft target. A former security chief, his cabinet is well stocked with ex-spooks who understand how tenaciously we must defend our freedom – especially from the likes of the two local journalists locked up in 2007 for suggesting corruption in the presidential household and curious property deals. And who better to entrust licences to explore for oil than family friends of the president?

So it is that at best clumsy support from donors has made a delicate situation here worse, not better. As our friends do not officially recognise us, and perhaps because we have yet to deliver on the promise of new oil wealth, we must hope there is a limit to what more they can do to help us towards peace and prosperity. Given the assistance our brothers to the south have received, perhaps this is no bad thing.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "More and more Japanese men are becoming interested in wearing bras," Ms Akiko Okunomiya of the Wishroom lingerie company told a press conference in Tokyo. "Since we launched our male bra, we've been inundated with orders, with customers telling us 'wow, we'd been waiting for this for such a long time.' The 160 bras that we initially produced sold out

in days, so now we've ordered 5,000 more. I was surprised at the sheer number of Japanese men who are looking for their inner woman."

But Wishroom president, Mr Masayuki Tsuchiya (who was modelling the bra for reporters), insisted that "our customers are not interested in cross-dressing. Many have weight problems and find that wearing a bra relaxes them. The larger Japanese salary men have a lot of stress in their lives, and the bras seem to relieve that, while giving lift and support. The bra is available in a choice of white, black, or blossom pink, all A cup, with a wide range of chest sizes. Most of our clients are heavy framed men in their 30s and 40s, but I've been surprised by the number of thinner men in their 60s who also enjoy the calming effects of a bra. They were the manly generation who led Japan out of the post-war depression, and perhaps they are now reacting against that macho stereotype." *(Times of India, 11/7/09. Spotter: Mal Function)*

– ● –

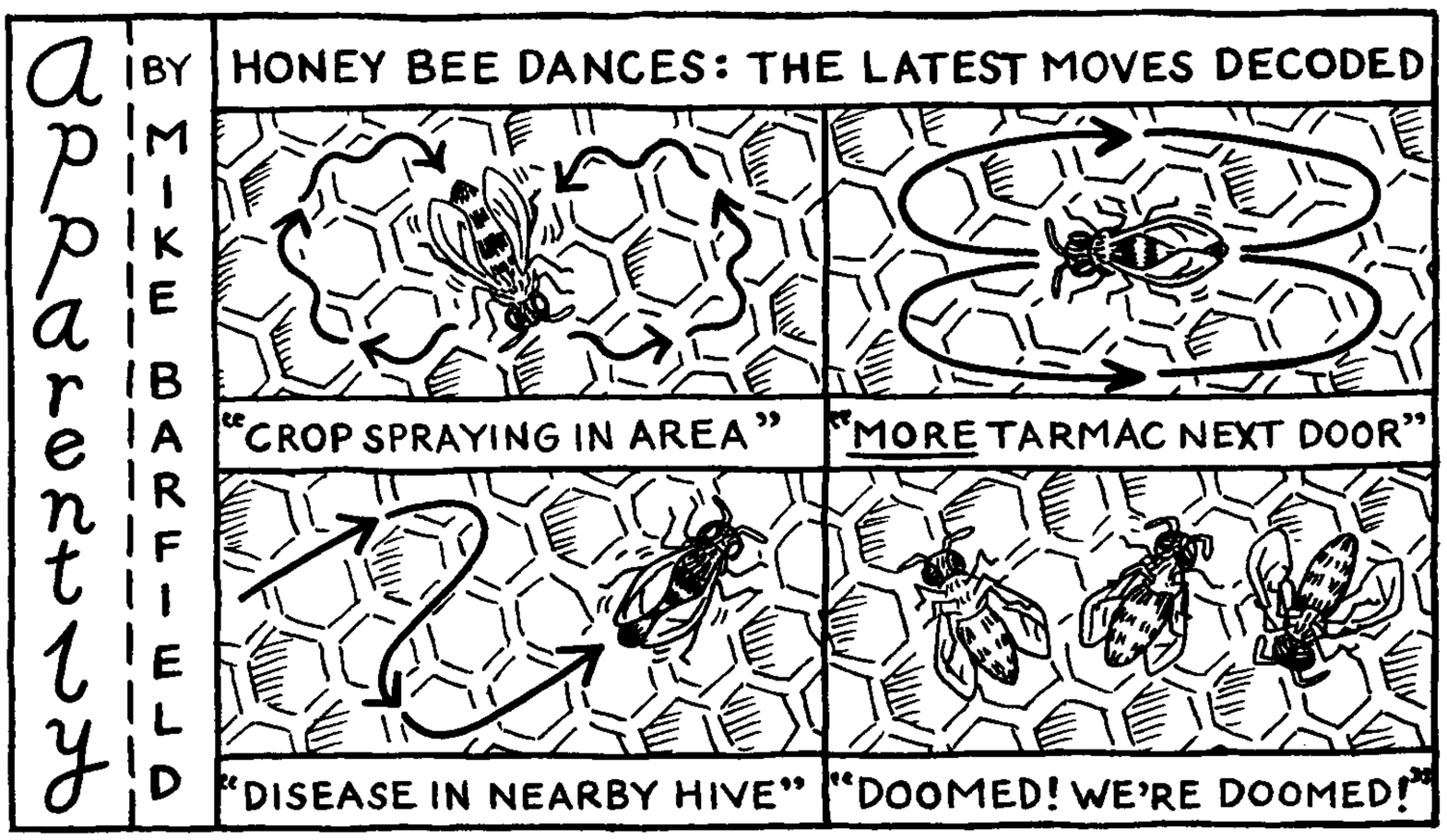
● *"My son started drinking gasoline five years ago, when he was nine," an unnamed father told reporters in Yibin City (Sichuan Province). "He was a fan of Transformers, and he told us he wanted to become 'a valiant fighter with supernatural strength' like Optimus Prime, the robot who drinks gasoline to obtain energy. At first, he kept stealing our cigarette lighters and sipping the contents, but then we noticed that our motorcycle's gasoline kept disappearing. One day I caught him drinking an entire bottle, but I was too shocked to say anything. Recently, he's started stealing gasoline from neighbours too, and he now drinks two or three bottles a day. Before he started, he was a smart boy, but his IQ has dropped sharply, and now he can't even figure out simple addition and subtraction."*

After examining the fourteen-year-old boy, Dr Peng Houquan of Yibin Hospital remarked that "he does not have supernatural strength, but he does have a strong gasoline dependency and a very serious mental disorder. Gasoline contains a lot of lead, which can do harm to people's brains. To make things worse, this boy is still in the stage of physical development, and the lead has caused serious damage to his body. He is also highly flammable much of the time. He really needs to get his gasoline addiction under control." (Shanghai Daily, 20/7/09. Spotter: Russell Fortune)

– ● –

● "This rubber tree plantation at the edge of our village seems to have become a natural haunt for criminals and murderers," Chief Krachang Noondam of Ban Khuan Kong village told reporters, "and we're sick and tired of corpses being dumped here. People kill each other in the city, then bring the slain bodies out here at night, and leave them for us to deal with. Just last month, the bodies of a hairdresser and a massage therapist from the downtown area were dumped over there. It's got so bad that, when our villagers go out at dawn to tap rubber, they are always afraid they may find yet another corpse.

"We have an old shaman in our village who communicates with the spirit world. He told us last month that someone would dump another woman's body, and it happened. Then he warned that a man's body would be left here, and that also happened. We got so tired of clearing up the corpses that we had to take pre-emptive measures, so we have now erected a sign that says 'No Dumping of Dead Bodies or Rubbish Here.' Now that we have declared the area 'a dead-body-free zone,' we're hoping that the criminals will go elsewhere." *(Bangkok Post, 26/5/09. Spotter: Vivian Orman)*



PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 52

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

As you will have gathered, I am now fully back in charge of the country after my very useful fact-finding summer recreational break.

I find in my absence that the lickspittle jackals of the Rothermerist-Murdochite press have set up a synthetically co-ordinated clamour, accusing me of heartless indifference to the plight of all the relatives of those who were unfortunate enough to die in the so-called Lockerbie air crash.

Comrades, it would have been only too easy for me to curry favour with the press by emulating the kind of sentimental heart-on-sleeveism practised by the discredited former leader, ex-Comrade Blair.

Comrade Blair, as we know, would not have let an occasion like this go past without appearing on television to issue a few trite and hypocritical platitudes, expressing his revulsion at the reception given to Mr Megrahi on his return to his native Libya, not to mention his artificial declarations of compassion and sympathy towards the loved ones of the victims of this terrorist atrocity.

No longer do we tolerate such cheap and sanctimonious babblings from the Supreme Leader on occasions of national tragedy.

Let me, therefore, state once and for all my feelings, as your Supreme Leader, on this highly regrettable episode.

First, I would like to express my revulsion at the reception accorded to Mr Megrahi on his return to his native Libya. This was, in my view, wholly unacceptable, and could give offence to all right-thinking Comrades.

Secondly, I would like to express my heartfelt compassion and sympathy for the relatives of those who died in this unfortunate and wholly unacceptable air crash.

As for the question of whether the Scottish Government should have released Mr Megrahi, I would like to make it clear that the Scottish authorities alone are entitled to decide what goes on in their country, and it would be entirely improper for me to seek to interfere in any way with the decisions of a foreign government.

As for the other important issues which have arisen during my brief working recreational break, I would also like to make statements on two of these in particular:

1. BRITAIN WINS BACK THE ASHES

I wish to congratulate Comrade Strauss and his hard-working team on meeting their target in achieving a satisfactory conclusion to the recent series of cricket matches between Britain and Australia.

In recognition of their achievements, I have decided to reward them with the highest honour that our country can bestow, ie a personal invitation from the Supreme Leader to a tacos-and-guacamole reception at 10 Downing Street at a date to be arranged.

2. THE BIG BROTHER REALITY SHOW

I have also been asked to comment on the decision by Channel 4 to discontinue the popular television series known as Big Brother.

I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate and to thank all those who over the years have made this programme synonymous with everything that is best in modern Britain.

All of us will in particular remember at this time the very special contribution made by the late Comrade Jade Goody, whose generous spirit and larger-than-life personality did so much to enrich our lives during her all too brief time on this earth.

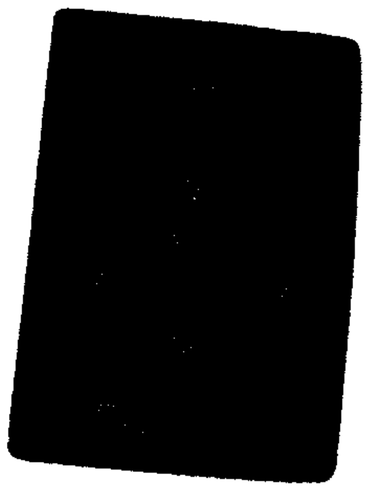
And, finally, I would like to thank Comrade Mandelson for his part in compiling the above tributes.

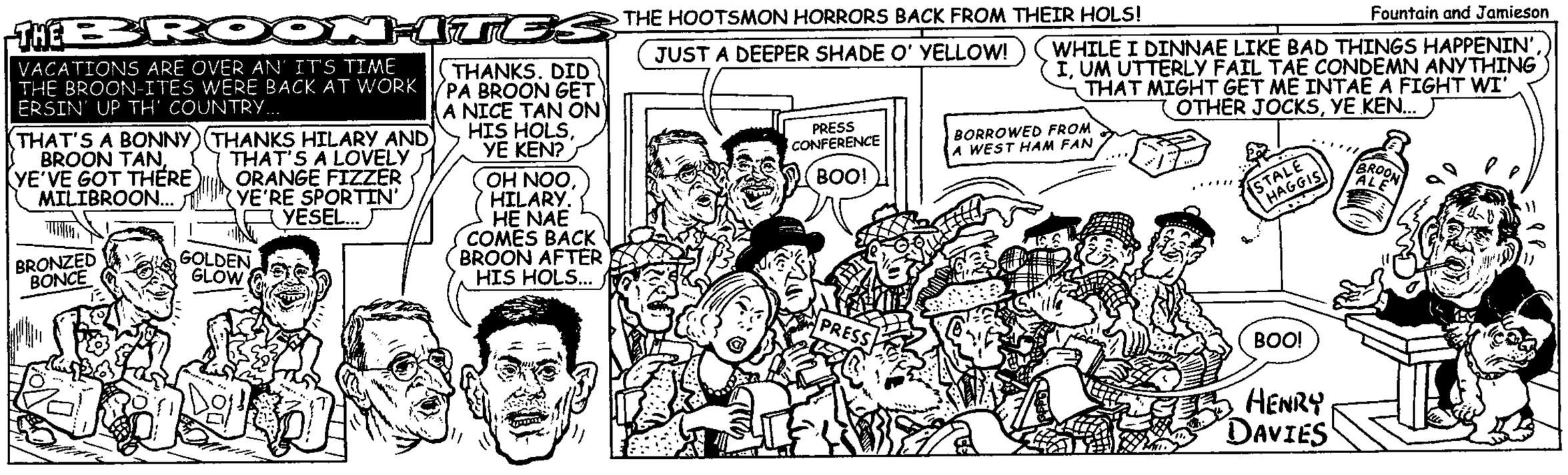
Yours,

Gordon Brown
Supreme Leader

"Silence is Gordon"

Taken from The Little Brown Book, Chapter 94, "Appropriate Responses To Economo-Diplomatic Crises"




THE BROON-ITES
VACATIONS ARE OVER AN' IT'S TIME THE BROON-ITES WERE BACK AT WORK ERSIN' UP TH' COUNTRY...
THAT'S A BONNY BROON TAN, YE'VE GOT THERE MILIBROON...
THANKS HILARY AND THAT'S A LOVELY ORANGE FIZZER YE'RE SPORTIN' YESEL...
BRONZED BONCE
GOLDEN GLOW
THANKS. DID PA BROON GET A NICE TAN ON HIS HOLS, YE KEN?
OH NOO, HILARY. HE NAE COMES BACK BROON AFTER HIS HOLS...
THE HOOTSMON HORRORS BACK FROM THEIR HOLS!
Fountain and Jamieson
JUST A DEEPER SHADE O' YELLOW!
PRESS CONFERENCE
BOO!
WHILE I DINNAE LIKE BAD THINGS HAPPENIN', I, UM UTTERLY FAIL TAE CONDEMN ANYTHING THAT MIGHT GET ME INTAE A FIGHT WI' OTHER JOCKS, YE KEN...
BORROWED FROM A WEST HAM FAN
STALE HAGGIS
BROON ALE
PRESS
BOO!
HENRY DAVIES

BRITAIN BASKS IN HOTTEST WASHOUT SUMMER SINCE RECORDS BEGAN

by Our Meteorological Staff

THEY said it was going to be a barbecue summer where Britain would sizzle just like the sausages on the grill. And it was. ***(Surely shome mishtake? Ed.)***

Once again the met men got it right *(Surely wrong, Ed.)* and all over the country sun-drenched Britons shivered as the temperatures dipped into the 90's. *(You're fired, Ed.)*

On Other Pages

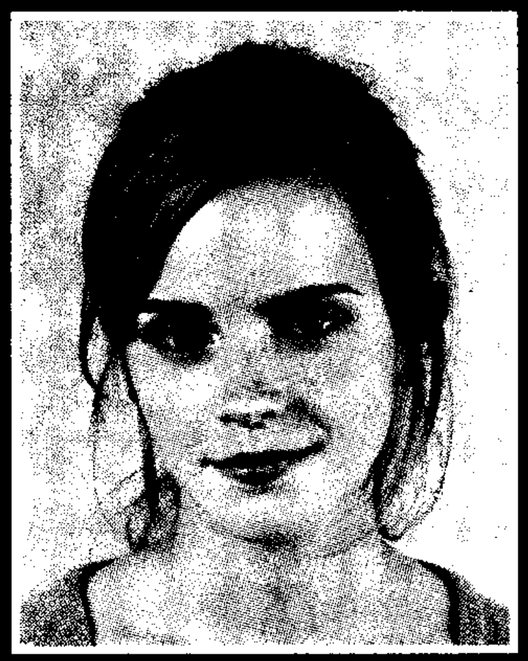
Does Aspirin Cause A Fall In House Prices? **2-94**

Top 10 Bestsellers

- **Anyone For The Nettle Soup?** The Official World War II Recipe Book. *(HMSO, £19.99)*
- **Jeremy Clarkson's Extreme World War II Machines.** *(BBC Books, £29.99)*
- **Ben Schott's World War II Almanac.** *(Schott Books, £39.99)*
- **The World War II Cartoons Of Nicholas Garland** by Vicky. With a Foreword by David Low. *(Telegraph Books, £49.99)*
- **Do Doodlebugs Sing?** Bizarre World War II questions and answers. *(New Scientist Books, £59.99)*
- **Classic World War II Bunkers** by Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen. *(BBC Books, £69.99)*
- **Michael Palin's Normandy.** *(BBC Books, £79.99)*
- **The Day My Book Broke Out by Max Hitler Hastings.** *(That's enough. Ed)*

HAS ANNE ROBINSON HAD A FACELIFT?

THEN



NOW

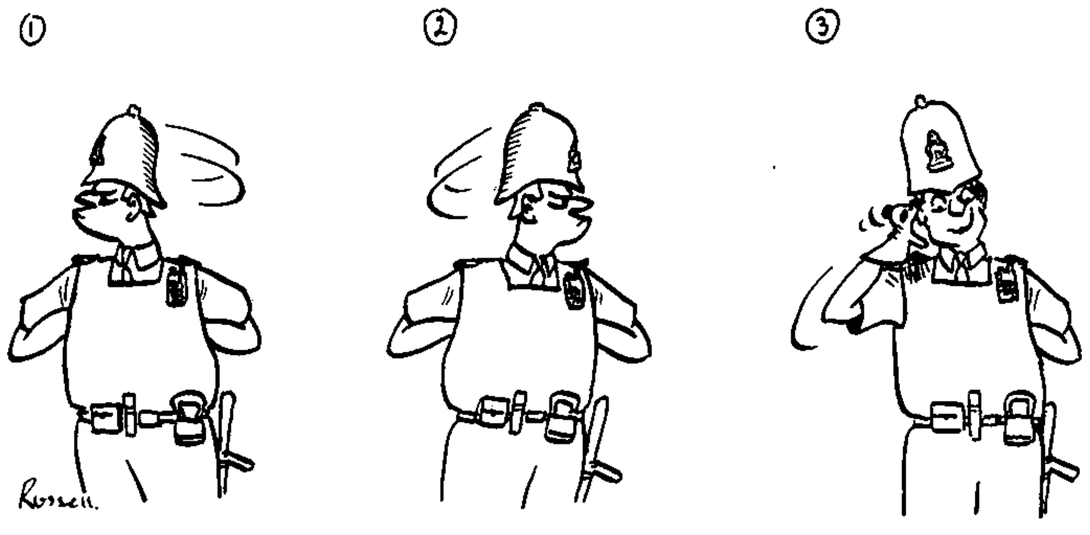
● **Has the veteran TV personality** ***(continued age 94)***

How They Are Not Related Any More

The Divorce Of The Century

Zachariah
|
St John The Baptist
|
St James The Fishpaste
|
Sir Jammy Goldfinger
|
Blofeld
|
Oddjob
|
Sir Jaws Goldsmith
|
Lady Annabel Fishpaste
(née Puddleduck)
|
Jemima Fishpaste
|
Zac Marmite

Rimsky-Korsakov
|
Princess Sheherezade
|
Ali Baba
|
Babar The Elephant
|
Lyn Babar (of the Observer)
|
Lord Rothschild
|
Mouton Dressed
As Rothschild
|
Lord Mandelson
|
David Cameron
|
Sherezac Fishpaste



POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Simon Dee, Star of TV's 'Dee Time' and Old Salopian

So. Farewell
Then Simon
Dee.

You were
The quintessential
Sixties figure,
DJ and
Chat show host.

Your real
Name, however,
Was Cyril
Nicholas
Henty-Dodd.

"Henty-
Dodd Time"

No, it
Does not
Sound the
Same.

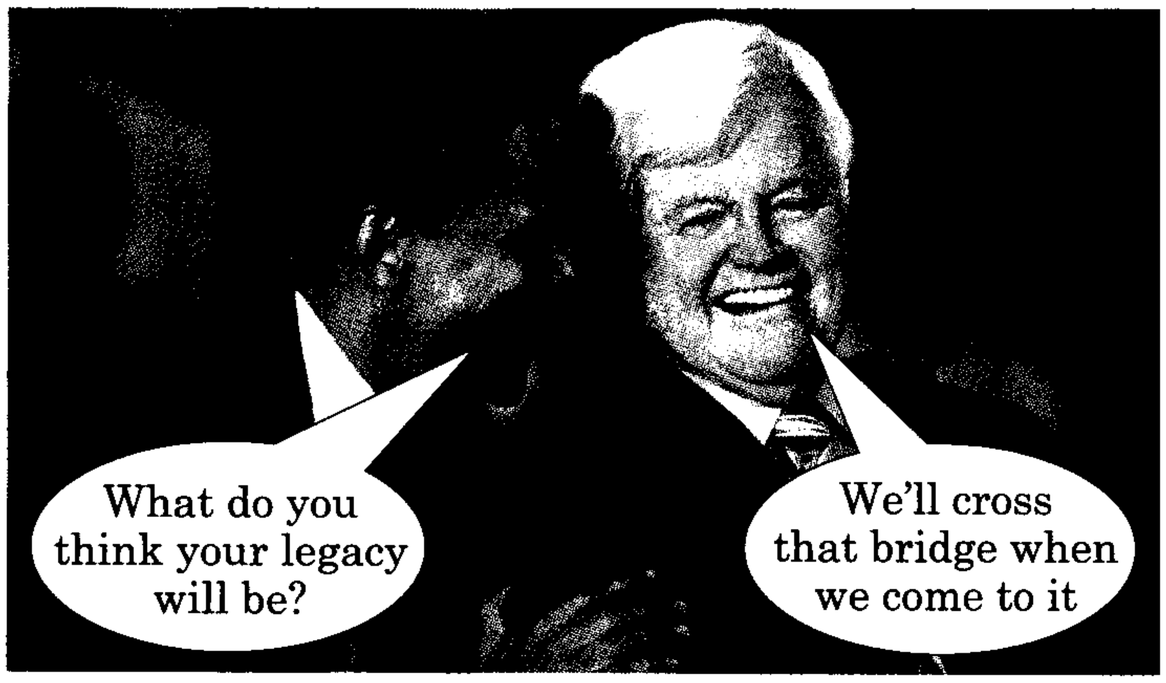
D.J. Thribb (17½)

School news

St Cakes

Retake Term begins today. There are 20,968 pupils in the school. A.J.R. Short-Planke (Dimmers) remains Head of Scholars until a university place becomes available. Miss Fruitella Aire-Head (Yahs) is still Senior Girl pending the re-mark of her Reality TV A-level and her acceptance by the University of Raynes Park (formerly The World of Sofas). Five new Houses are in the process of construction on Ploughman's Lunch Meadow to accommodate the increased number of students. They will be named after recent benefactors of the school – Emirates, GazProm, Manchester City, The Chinese Communist Party, Lakeland. St Cakes Day will be celebrated on November 5th when Sir Fred Goodwin (O.C) will speak on the theme of "A Second Career: The Challenge of the Post-Recession Landscape". He will then formally close the computer centre. There will be a performance of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of a Place at Leeds* on 5th December. Tickets from the burser Major Ecclestone, The Pits. The Run will be held on The Bank on 11th October. Bailouts are on December 12th.

EDWARD KENNEDY DIES



WORLD MOURNS 'GREATEST EVER STATESMAN'

by Our Entire Staff

THEY ARE calling him "the greatest statesman of our time". The mark he has left on the history of our age will never be erased.

Today, with the departure of the man known to millions as simply Senator Edward Kennedy, mankind has lost one of its finest sons.

One of his greatest achievements was to be the brother of President John F. Kennedy, so cruelly assassinated in 1963.

But he did more. He was also the brother of Robert Kennedy, so cruelly assassinated in 1968.

Jolly Good Chappaquiddick

But possibly his greatest achievement was to rebuild his career following the tragic accident at Chappaquiddick in 1969, in which he was so unfortunate as to be involved.

How did he do it? The answer is simple. It was a tribute to the fact that he was not only the brother of former President Kennedy, but also the brother of Robert Kennedy.

The world pays tribute to 'a giant among men'

AMONG those who were last night paying their respects to the late Ted Kennedy were President Obama, Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama and Stephen Fry.

Those Kennedy funeral arrangements in full

1pm
Hearse carrying Edward Kennedy's body leaves the church to begin the three miles drive to the cemetery.

1.13pm
Hearse inexplicably speeds up in heavy fog as it approaches rickety bridge.

1.14pm
Hearse careers of the bridge and crashes into the icy water of the lake below.

1.19pm
Hearse driver panics and runs off.

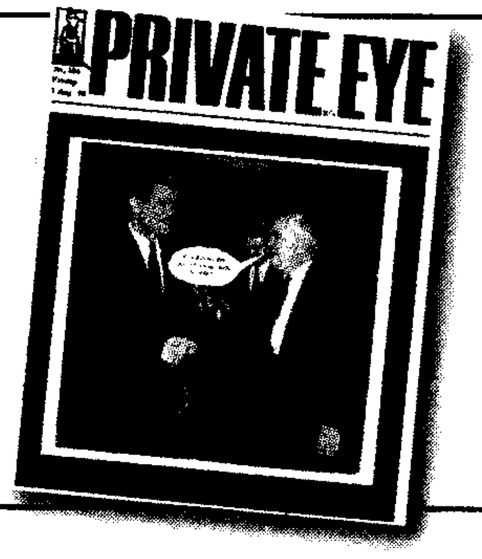
Nine hours later
Hearse driver turns up in Connecticut and Edward Kennedy's coffin is finally reported missing.

"I'm at work, you stupid cow!"

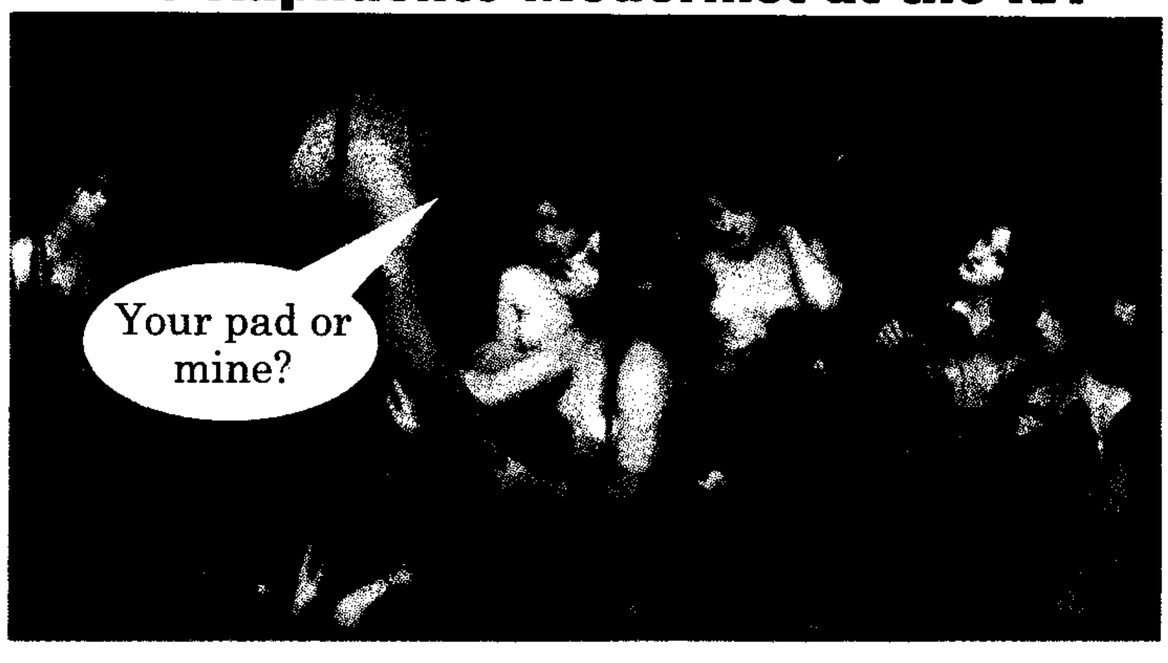
100 Years Ago

1969 – What the Eye said:

"You Kennedys can get away with murder"



Pre-Raphaelite Modernist at the RA



Notes&queries

Do wasps go to sleep?

● The answer given by the Rev. Stephen Fieldmouse is only partially correct.

A recent paper from the Intitut de Guêpes in Limoges has established that although the wasp may appear to be fully asleep, its condition is more accurately described as 'dozing'. Interestingly the 14th century Florentine poet Gulielmo della Lambretta spoke in one of his sonnets about the 'haply dozing wasp'.
Marjorie Wimpole (Mrs), Dumfries

● Mrs Wimpole makes an all-too familiar mistake when she refers to the "14th century Florentine poet Guliemo della Lambretta". Not only was he in fact Sienese, but his proper name was Guliemo della Vespa (of the wasp). It was he who gave his name some centuries later to the well-known brand of motor scooter, made popular in Italy in the 1950s by such films as Roman Holiday starring Audrey Hepburn and Cary Grant.
Melanie Wheatcroft (Ms), Hertfordshire

● Ms. Wheatcroft is in error in having Audrey Hepburn as the star of Roman Holiday. The female lead in that rather over-rated 50s comedy was in fact her sister, Katherine Hepburn.
Louis Barfe, Southwold

Answers please to the following:

Who invented the wheelie bin? Can moths whistle? Is it true that the BBC's Radio 3 can be heard on Mars? What is Matthew D'Ancona's real name?

News In Brief

IS HE REALLY A MAN?

by our Gender Correspondent
Dee N. Ay

DOCTORS have insisted that Gordon Brown really is a man, despite tests revealing that he 'showed no balls whatsoever' by refusing to comment publicly on the release of Abdel Basset al-Megrahi.

"We accept that these tests revealed three times the usual levels of political cowardice in his decision to remain silent.

"But the fact he doesn't have any balls doesn't prove that Gordon Brown doesn't have any balls."

TRAINS WILL TAKE 16 YEARS TO REACH MANCHESTER

by our Railway Correspondent
Victoria Station

THE Government is to back an £18 million project to build a new railway line between London and Manchester which, by 2025, will enable commuters to travel between the two cities at speeds of up to two yards a year.

Applauding this astonishing technological breakthrough, Mr Gordon Brown said yesterday, "If anyone could give us the money to build this line, would they please get in touch."

JACKSON HAD LETHAL PUBLICITY LEVELS

by our Showbiz Correspondent
Michael White

IT WAS yesterday confirmed by experts that Michael Jackson's lifeblood contained dangerously high levels of hype, which probably contributed to his death.

A medical expert said, "The amount of publicity we found in his lifeblood was several times the amount of that found in any normal human being."

JAYCEE: is this story too disgusting to read ?

● Full story and pix – page 1-94

An Open Letter To FAY WELDON From Polly Filler

Dear Fay,

We have never met, but I have admired your writing... until now. Fay, love, I have to be honest, your interview in which you said it was okay to pick up your husband's socks and clean the loo let all of us in the sistren down. What could you have been thinking of?

Are you seriously suggesting I should traipse around after the Useless Simon with a toilet brush while he sits slumped in front of the Ashes on Sky Sport, as he has done for what seems like an eternity?

Get real, Fay. It is not my job to pick up his dirties. No, it is the job of the au pair. This week, she happens to come from what used to be a small village in Helmand Province, which Qash-les tells us is now a pile of rubble. So, picking up Useless Simon's pongy socks is scarcely a hardship, compared to picking up the pieces of your grandfather.

So, next time you want to enlighten the world about how women should behave, get your au pair to do it for you.

Yours in the land of sisterhood,

Polly.

Advertisement

ACTION man

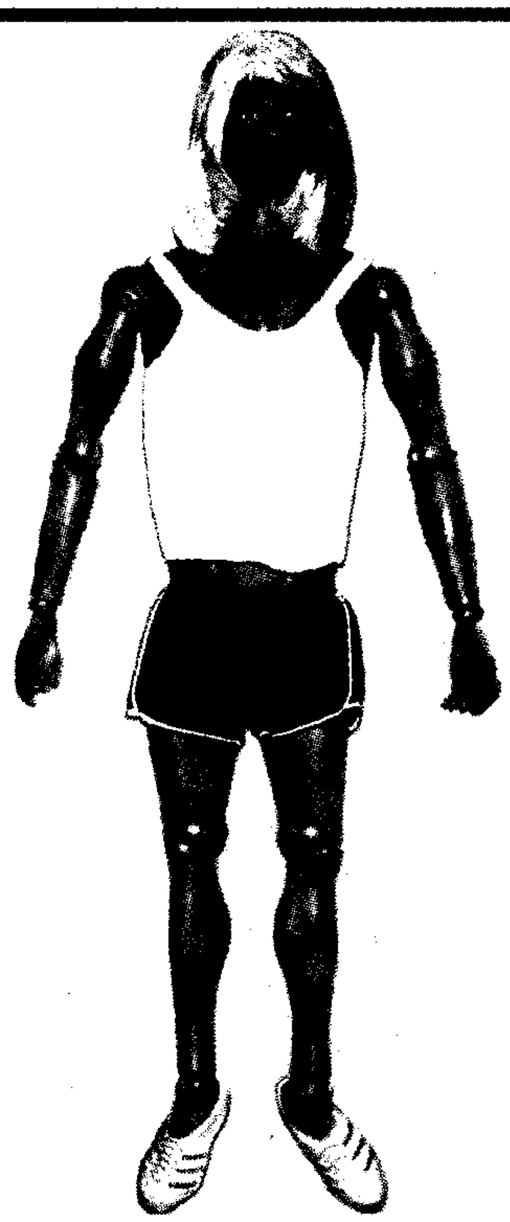
FEMALE ATHLETE

Add this sensational new action figure to your collection – and enjoy hours of gold-medal winning fun!

❍ **Sheman®** comes complete with running shorts, jockstrap and no sports bra.

❍ But **Sheman®** does include a signed doctor's certificate confirming she is 100% not a man really.

Don't be disappointed!
Order your **Sheman®** today, as they're running out of the shops fast *(Geddit?!?!)*



POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Ellie Greenwich, US Songwriter

So. Farewell
Then Ellie Greenwich,

Famous songwriter of
The 60s.

Yes, we remember
Your many unforgettable
Hits.

"There she was
Just a-walkin' down
The street."

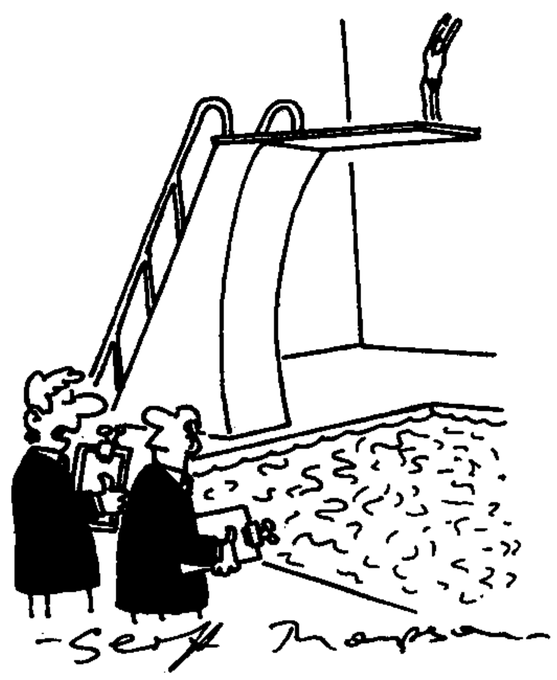
All together now –

"Singing Doo-
Wah diddy-diddy
Dum diddy-doo."

And now you are
Dum diddy-dead.

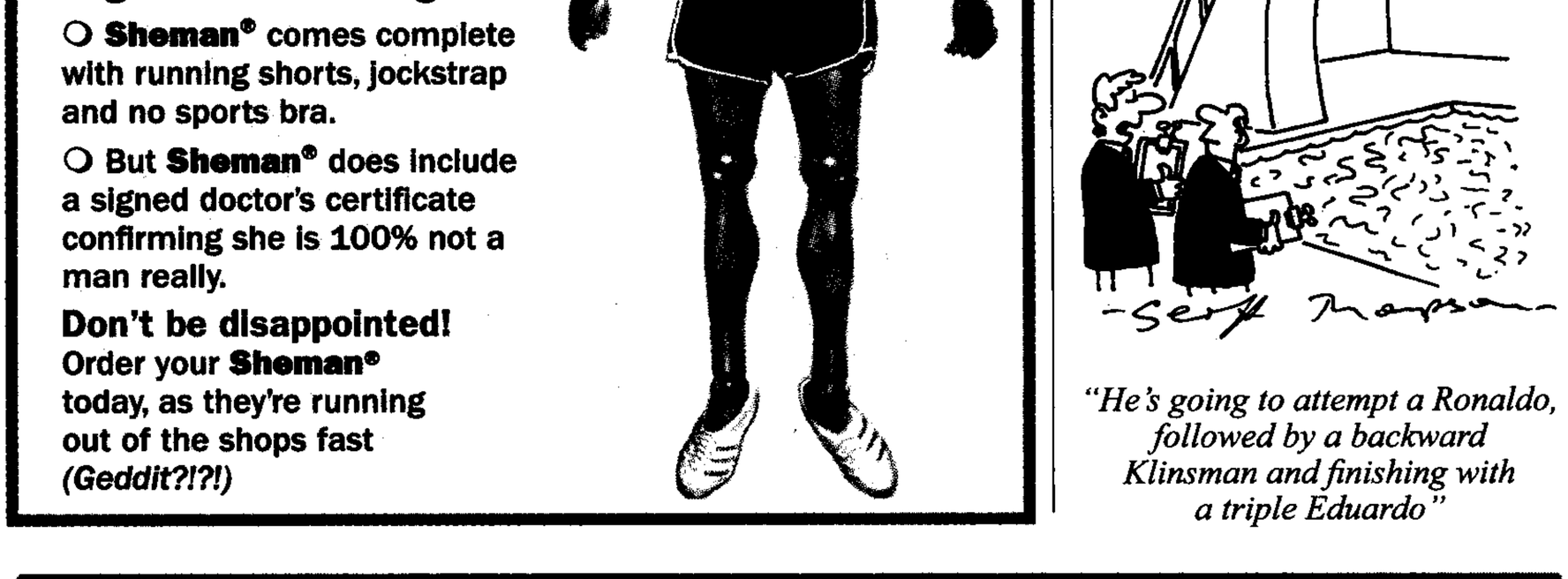
Sadly.

E.J. Thribb (17½)



"He's going to attempt a Ronaldo, followed by a backward Klinsman and finishing with a triple Eduardo"

the PREMIERSH*TS



FREDDIE FAILS IN FINAL TEST

RED BULL SHAME – Where's the booze, Freddie?

by Our Cricketing Staff
Lunchtime O'Val

MILLIONS of cricket lovers were disappointed yesterday by the miserable failure of their all-rounder hero to live up to the nation's expectations as the Ashes series drew to its dramatic climax.

For days, everyone had been looking forward to the moment when "Fantastic Fred" (as no one calls him) would walk off the pitch and proceed to sink 14 bottles of champagne, 24 cognacs and several crates of lager, in celebration of England's historic victory.

Not Out For The Count

Thousands of journalists and photographers had gathered to witness what they hoped would be a final glorious display of Freddie's legendary ability to get drunk.

But it was not to be. Instead of vomiting from the top of a London bus and peeing in the garden of Number Ten, Freddie threw away his big chance for a final moment of glory by tamely choosing instead to go back home to his wife and family.

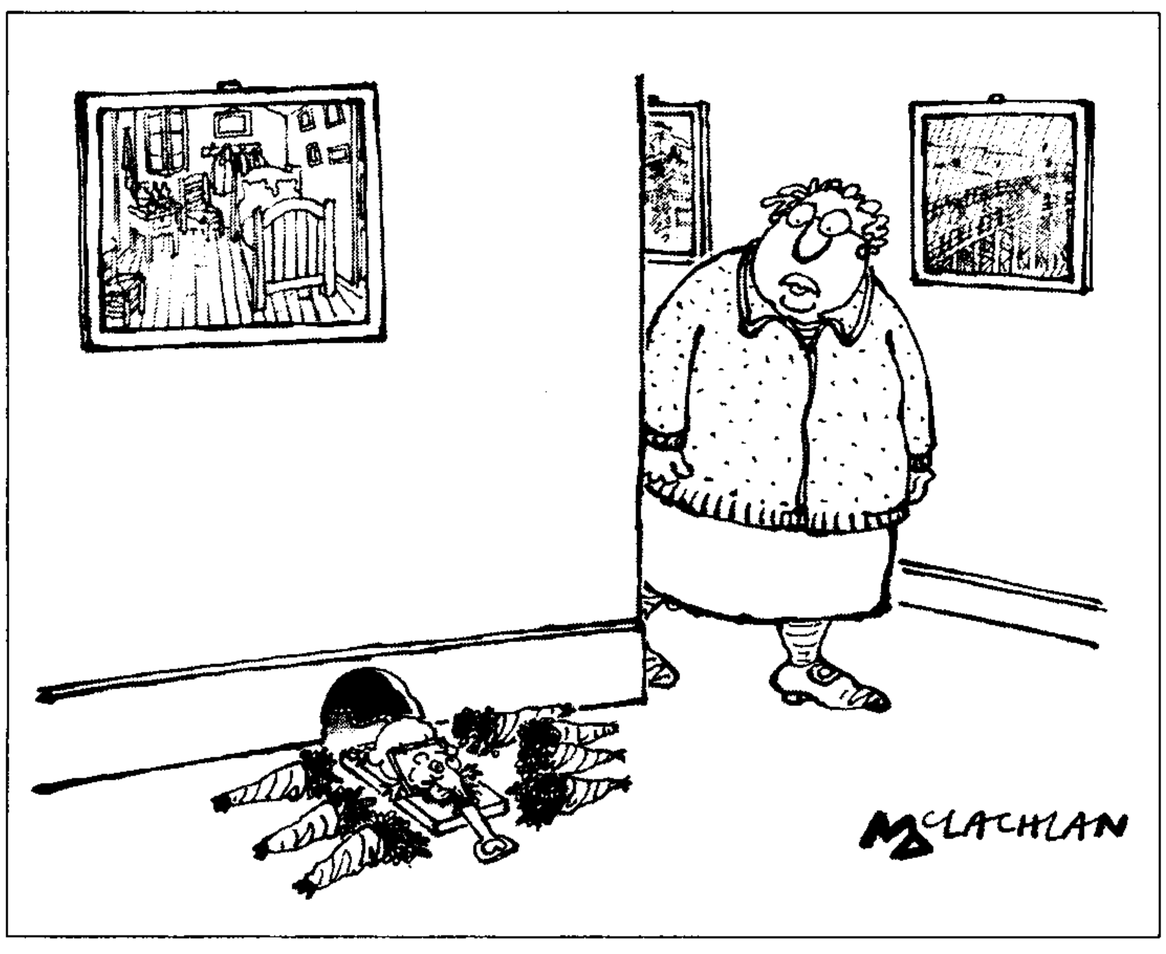
Middle and Legless

Said one disappointed Flintoff fan, Ken Mumble, "a group of us came up from Sutton Coldfield hoping to see Fred go on a last glorious blinder, which would stand in the record books for ever.

"I tell you, it broke my heart to learn that he was just sitting in a Chinese restaurant with his Dad, eating Dim Sum and sipping mint tea.

"It grieves me to say this, but if that's the best he can do, the game is better without him."

■ *Did Freddie let the nation down? What do you think? Text or email us now on tw@Ivegotnothingelsetodo.com*



Sydney Mourning Herald

Friday 4 September

SICKENING SCENES MAR SPORTING OCCASION

THE world of sport was shocked and appalled last night at the scenes of wild celebration, as the Ashes returned to England.

"These sickening images beamed live round the world showing the England cricketers receiving a hero's welcome were horrifying to everyone," said one Australian, standing by a barbie.

"We thought we had seen the last of such stomach-churning spectacles as players running around the pitch, waving to spectators and brandishing the Ashes urn. We were wrong. It must never happen again."

The Prime Minister Gordon Brown refused to comment on the celebrations, saying the England and Wales cricket team was solely the responsibility of the Scottish government.

From Gnome Souvenirs

THE FREDDIE FLINTOFF MEMORIAL PLATE

TO COMMEMORATE the historic retirement from test cricket of England's legendary drinks all-rounder, Gnome Heritage Products Ltd™ proudly presents this stunning plate-style Flintoff memento.

Designed by the Delft-based master craftsman Roger van Twerp, this authentic porcelain-style bakelite dish is a genuine investment that you and your children's partners' stepchildren-by-their-former-partners-now-fighting-child-maintenance-suits-in-the-local-magistrates'-court will treasure for years to come.

WARNING: Like Sir Freddie Flintoff, this memorial plate is extremely fragile, and may fall to pieces in a dishwasher situation, revealing an image of the late Michael Jackson or possibly the late Jade Goody. This is quite normal, and no money will be refunded.

Price 5 (pounds) for 92. Send now to Flintoff Plate Offer, Unit 94, The Notout Trading Estate, Oval, England.

NEASDEN v. DOLLIS HILL – OBAMA TO BROKER PEACE DEAL

by **E.I. Erewego**, Our Man In The Smart Car With The Copy Of *Nuts* And A Packet Of Fairtrade Polo Mints.

FOLLOWING scenes of unprecedented violence between the warring fans of North Circular Relegation League clubs Neasden and Dollis Hill, President Obama has personally intervened in an attempt to bring peace to wartorn Neasden.

The years of strife and bloodshed between the two clubs were sparked off in 1922 when Neasden club founder Sir Isaiah Cohen (1857-1923) banned Dollis Hill fans from using his steam laundry facilities in Mafeking Street.

In the years that followed, whenever the two clubs met there were outbursts of violence, often leading to a large number of fatalities.

SHOCK

However, in recent years, the two sets of supporters have enjoyed an uneasy truce – until this week.

Said long-serving ashen-faced supremo Ron Knee, 59, "The resumption of this long feud is deeply tragic to my mind. Our fans (Sid and Doris Bonkers) are peace-loving individuals who only react in the face of extreme provocation – which was the case on Tuesday night."

Speaking with emotion and his arm in a sling, Knee ran through the catalogue of horror which was Neasden Bridge 25/8 – as they are already calling it.

ANOTHER SHOCK

"It was all going very smoothly," said the tight-lipped mastermind, "and we were looking forward to a peaceful outcome when Dollis Hill's Ivory Coast striker Jean-Pierre Akiwonki deliberately and provocatively kicked the ball into the net past one-legged netminder Wally Foot, who was understandably asleep at the time.

"This outrageous action called for a response from our supporters and Sid and Doris, using their seats as improvised weapons, stormed onto the pitch leaving a trail of devastation in their wake. Within minutes the stadium was ablaze with the Dollis Hill dressing room taking a major hit.

"From there the conflagration quickly spread to the surrounding streets, blocking the way for the emergency services trying to evacuate the wounded and the dying."

"It is a sad day for the beautiful game.

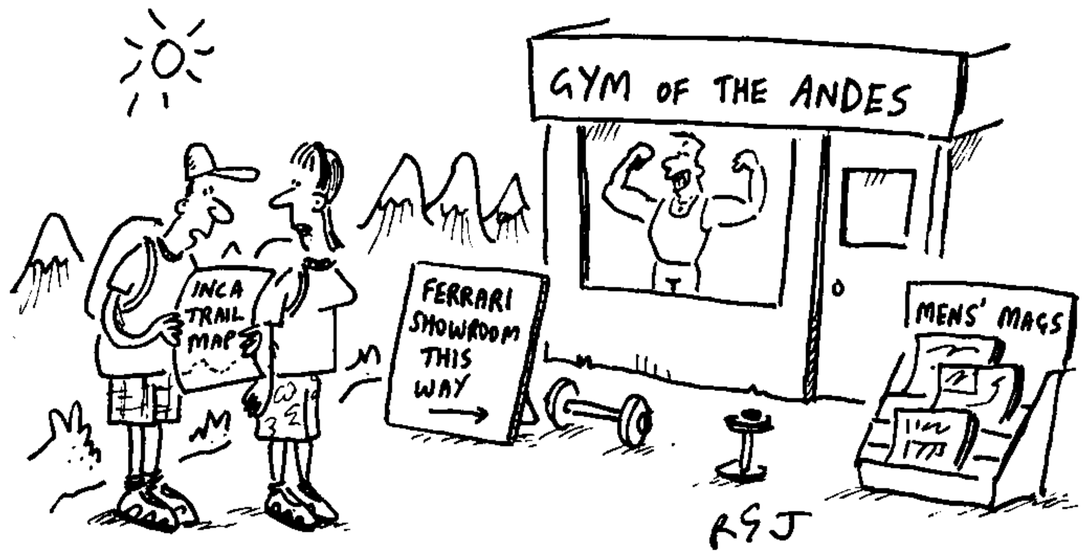
Ron Knee is 59.

Late Score

Patio Paradise Cup

Neasden 0 — Dollis Hill 1 (Akiwonki)

(Match abandoned due to pitch invasion)



"Apparently, we've arrived at Macho Picchu"

BBC Radio 3

Opera Highlights

Il Divorzio di Silvio

AS the curtain rises, we see Signora Silvio, the estranged wife of the Robber Baron, tearfully confiding in the faithful old family physician, Doctor Quaqui.

She tells him that her husband thinks of nothing but "love", day and night.

The doctor responds in the aria *"His days of philandering will never be over,"* explaining that her husband is a victim of what is known to the medical profession as "sex addiction".

At this moment, there is a noise of giggling outside, and the Robber Baron enters, with two provocatively-clad courtesans on each arm.

Winking at the audience, he launches into the trio *"Tre in Letto" ("Three in a bed, that's what I like")*, as he prepares to lead the ladies into his bedroom.

The doctor intervenes, protesting that the Baron is in need of medical help for his life-threatening condition.

"Ito sanitorio," he sings, describing the little clinic he runs in the mountains.

For only *"Mille e tre euro,"* sings the doctor, *"I could have you cured of your addiction"*.

At this point, Silvio's wife joins in to plead with her husband that he should take the doctor's wise guidance and, to the surprise of all, the Baron agrees.

Act Two

We are now at the Sanitorio Aphrodisio in the mountains. Silvio's wife arrives, carrying grapes and full of hope that her husband will by now have been cured of his addiction.

"Come e mio marito?" she enquires of the very pretty receptionist, Nigella.

"He has never been better," laughs Nigella, flinging open the curtains at the back of the stage.

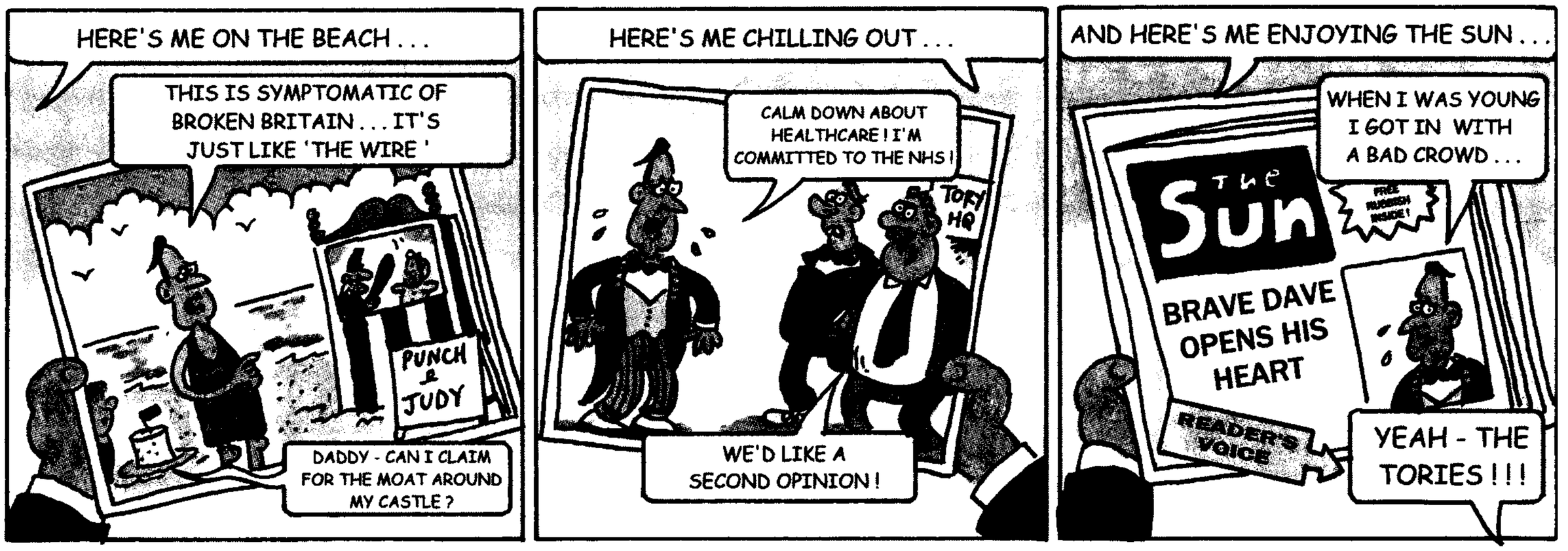
We see Silvio on a huge, circular bed, surrounded by a chorus of adoring nurses who seem only too eager to comply with his every demand.

They all cheerfully sing *"His tiny gland is swollen"* and Silvio replies *"They are giving me the treatment – I will soon be totally cured"*.

CURTAIN

■ *A box set of the operas of Berlusconi, performed members of the Dignitas Death Chamber Orchestra with the Euthanasia Singers, conducted by the late Sir Edward Downes, has just won the Sony Radio 3 Award for the worst recording of 2009.*

Dave Snooty's HOLIDAY SNAPS


HERE'S ME ON THE BEACH . . .
THIS IS SYMPTOMATIC OF BROKEN BRITAIN . . . IT'S JUST LIKE 'THE WIRE '
PUNCH & JUDY
DADDY - CAN I CLAIM FOR THE MOAT AROUND MY CASTLE ?
HERE'S ME CHILLING OUT . . .
CALM DOWN ABOUT HEALTHCARE ! I'M COMMITTED TO THE NHS !
TORY HQ
WE'D LIKE A SECOND OPINION !
AND HERE'S ME ENJOYING THE SUN . . .
WHEN I WAS YOUNG I GOT IN WITH A BAD CROWD . . .
The Sun
FREE RUDOLPH INSIDE !
BRAVE DAVE OPENS HIS HEART
READER'S VOICE
YEAH - THE TORIES ! ! !

From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Violence at West Ham

I was particularly worried about the four-year-old boy who came on the pitch. He looked like a very dangerous child, and I hope the police will have a serious word with him. – ***Emily***

That boy comes near my girls I swear Ill do time – ***Family_Man***

spot on emerly ☻ was you 1 of the lady millwall fan's attacked by wet spam muppet's? – ***Let_em_come***

Chelsea's chutney ferrets started all this bringing kids on the pitch. Surprise surprise, the media loved it when their players done it. – ***Chicken_Run_Ron***

They never took kids into battle back in the days of Bobby the Wolf, Harry the Dog, Mad Pat and Winkle. But I do have happy memories of sitting on my old man's shoulders while granddad put the windows in at Micky Purser's showroom in the Old Kent Road. The Wall had lost again and supporters were giving the chairman some "feedback". Directors and refs were fair game but they never touched cripples, kids, ladies or blind people (refs excepted!). – ***Millwall_Enough_Said***

Good to see some old faces come out of retirement the other night. I was showing my boys a leaflet from 31 years ago. "THIS IS THE DAY WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR, FOR OVER TWO YEARS! TWO YEARS TO BUILD UP HATRED AND ABHORRENCE TOWARDS THEM WEST HAM SHIT BASTARDS, SOME OF WHOM WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MURDER OF LEE, AT NEW CROSS STATION. THIS IS NO ORDINARY RUCK. THEY KILLED A MILLWALL FAN. EVERYONE WE DO IS FOR LEE." Sums it up. West Ham scum I shit em. – ***CBL_72***

we'er all mad we'er insane we frew millwall off the train ☺ – ***Basilden_Bubbles***

jog on you mug ☻ suprised they never blam-ed us for that an all – ***No_1_Likes_Us***

your havin a laugh no 1 ☻ same old anty west ham properganda from milwall media maf-ia danny baker rod liddle and the rest – ***West_Stand_Chap***

rod lidl name-d after a chav shop ☺ sez it all – ***Romford_Iron***

do 1 ronford u shop at matalan – ***Sidcup_Lion***

get aid's ☺ o wait u alredy got it u skanky milwal cunt ☹ – ***rise_sir_boby***

Great stuff guys! – ***Bogbrush***

Advertisement

GNOMELIFT The First Name In Stairlifts

For a hundred years Gnomelift has been taking the pain and effort out of climbing the stairs. Now we offer Private Eye readers an amazing range of comfort-clad stair mobility second to none.

Introducing the...

Stairbath

This unique **Gnomelift** innovation combines the very best in stairlift technology with up-to-date walk-in bath know-how.

No longer will you waste precious time taking a stairlift to your walk-in bath. Now simply step into your walk-in bath at the foot of the stairs and in seconds you're transported to the top landing in style and comfort.

★ *Says top historian Lady Antonia Fraser: "I would not be without it – even though I live in a flat."*

Price £2,999 (self-assembly)

The Titchmarsh

A long-time favourite with our green-fingered customers, the Titchmarsh has been tailormade to take the effort out of getting to your garden shed.

★ *Says TV's June Whitfield: "Even though I do not have a garden, the Titchmarsh has changed my life."*

Price £29,999 (self-assembly)

● ***Coming soon*** – **The Stairshed**. A gardening revolution where your shed comes to YOU. Say goodbye to the long trek down the garden path. Now the shed comes all the way to your bathroom.

The Windsor

Get to the top landing in regal splendour with the Windsor de-luxe model. Fashioned from traditional English Oak and upholstered in Rich Burgundy leather, the Windsor makes you think you are a Queen as you slide effortlessly up towards the shed outside your bathroom.

Price £43,999 (self-assembly)

★ *TV's Julian Fellowes says: "All my baronial staircases are equipped with the Windsor. One finds it indispensable."*

Le Bistro

You'll imagine you are in Paris as you float heavenwards to the strains of the accordion while sipping your café-au-lait and nibbling a freshly baked croissant.

★ *"C'est magnifique!" says would-be MP Esther Rantzen.*

Price €94,000

DIARY

BREAKFAST WITH JANET STREET PORTER

Every morning, it's time for bloody breakfast. I'm very sorry this might be a very controversial thing to say but sorry guys I'm going to bloody well say it and even some of my closest high-profile big-name friends like the Pet Shop Boys or Elton couldn't get me not to say it, even if they wanted.

So, here goes: *I'm not going to have anyone tell me what I can or can't have for breakfast. How dare they? It's my breakfast, so I'll eat what I bloody well want, thank you very much. So bloody there!*

I always have breakfast in the morning, after I wake up. It's my bloody life and I can live it how I want. If this makes me a so-called oddball, well, so bloody what?

Step out of your comfort zone, guys!

I'm not a sheep, I don't follow the flock, I've got a mind of my own and I'll eat breakfast when I want to eat breakfast and not when everyone else says I've got to eat breakfast, thank you very much indeed (not!).

I'm absolutely sick and tired of so-called celebrities telling us what to have or not have for breakfast.

If I want a boiled egg I'll bloody have a boiled bloody egg, regardless of what my high-profile VIP celebrity friends like big-name American President Barack Obama might say.

And anyway, why shouldn't I have a boiled egg if I want a boiled egg?

As far as I know, It's not a crime – or at any rate not yet!!!

But the simple fact is we do probably eat too many boiled eggs for breakfast so it's probably right from a nutrition point of view and also if we want to save the world that we should all cut down.

But the fact remains that in my book you can never eat too many boiled eggs for breakfast so why don't these pampered celebrities just mind their own business for once, that's what I'd like to know?

And could someone please please please tell me just what's so wrong with teaching your grandmother to suck eggs for heaven's sake?

When I was a little girl of five or six – who's bloody counting? – every few weeks I used to tell my Nan to sit down and shut up while I taught her to suck eggs.

I'd boil them first – no-one wants to suck a raw egg unless you're a bloody loony and call me what you like but I'm certainly not a bloody loony – and then I'd tell Nan to open her mouth wide, like she was beginning to sound off about something, and then I'd force that egg in. "Now suck on that bloody thing, Nan, and then suck some more and don't answer back," I'd say.

She never thanked me for the lesson, but that's Nans for you. Teach them to suck eggs and they just tell you to fuck the fuck off.

Big-name VIP monarch Queen Elizabeth II may be a mate of mine – but no way does that give her the right to tell me what to do with my life.

Her Maj may settle for a snooty posh breakfast of toast and marmalade cooked by fawning flunkies, sorry, servants, but it's high time she realised that normal women like me might want something more substantial because some of us have high-profile careers to attend to.

It frankly gets on my bloody nerves the way some people turn their snotty noses up at the Full English Breakfast.

I love my mate top supermodel with legs to die for Kate Moss to bits but she'd be better off having two fried eggs, three rashers of bacon, a banger, mushrooms, tomatoes, black pudding and a fried slice than sticking all that white powder up her nose and no mistake.

And what about little Mercy, Madonna's newly adopted cut-price designer baby from Malawi, wherever that is when it's at home?

Has muscley pop-star La Madonna given little Mercy (and what sort of name's THAT for a child?) a decent Full English yet? And if not, why not, that's what I'd like to know?

Eat up your Full English, Mercy, or you won't be getting any fucking pudding and I don't care if you do squeal so there. Those are the words I'd like to hear around their kitchen table each morning. But I bet Madonna's already feeding the little mite something disgusting like vegetarian Bran Flakes.

Is this really better than a life growing up eating bugs and lizards or whatever in Africa? If you ask me Madonna's patronising attitude stinks.

My top-rated VIP friends Sir Elton John and The Pet Shop Boys among others just as famous are always literally begging me for my top-secret recipe for my full English breakfast.

Get off my case, boys, is what I want to say. Oh, well, okay then, since you ask – here it bloody is!

First of all lay the table. You can't eat fried eggs in your hands as I learnt to my cost when I tried it once at an ultra-posh breakfast for my mate high-flying Princess Grace of Monaco.

Believe me, those yolks went bloody everywhere – all over my beautiful Zandra Rhodes vermilion ballgown, clean on that morning.

So you'll be wanting a knife and fork for each person and a plate too. Why do top chefs plain-Jane Delia Smith and feisty Gordon Ramsay always forget to put knives and forks and plates in their top-selling recipe books, that's what I want to know?

I can't count the number of times my high-flying VIP dinner party guests have ended up with Chicken Curry all over their laps just because they forgot to include the bloody plates.

Then you smash the eggs into your frying pan and pick out all the bits of shell with your fingers.

Toss in all the other bits except the sausages which I never bother to cook because I prefer them raw and Bob's your uncle.

In fact Bob was my great uncle and he couldn't keep his hands off me or my best mate Jane, but that's another fucking story and frankly it can wait.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

I FOUND THIS OLD VIDEO I TOOK OF PIXIE FROU FROU'S 4TH BIRTHDAY PARTY AND HAD IT TRANSFERED TO DVD
THEY'RE ALL PLAYING OLD-FASHIONED PARTY GAMES TOGETHER BUT YOU COULD SEE THAT SHE MIGHT GROW UP TO BE A BIT OF A DIVA EVEN THEN...
WATCH THIS: HER AND HER FRIENDS PLAYING "FOLLOW THE LEADER"
STOP STALKING ME OR I'LL CALL THE POLICE...

Literary Review

Granny takes a slip

The Sixties
Jenny Diski
(Profile, £10.99)

THE Sixties generation is now in its sixties. With a free bus pass in the pocket of its purple cardigan, it has given itself over to rosy-spectacled recollection. Granny takes a trip down memory lane. "We had proper music in those days, dear."

Jenny Diski, born in 1947, is of that generation and proud of it. Though she claims to offer analysis, her book is just another nostalgic "me"-moir of that era, rambling on about the shops shopped at (Biba, Bus Stop, Bazaar), the drugs taken (methedrine, cannabis, LSD), the books read (Herman Hesse, Carlos Castaneda, I Ching), the music listened to (Jefferson Airplane, Grateful Dead, Incredible String Band), the demonstrations gone on (Aldermaston, Grosvenor Square), the sexual revolution, gay rights, women's lib, radical politics and so on.

In other words, it is just like all the other books about the Sixties. The only difference is that she occasionally stops to wonder why it all went horribly wrong. But she cannot bring herself to blame her own generation for the consequences of its psychedelic silliness. "We were completely wrong-footed when the 1960s turned inexorably into the 1980s," she wails. "We really didn't see it coming, the new world of rabid individualism and the sanctity of profit."

Perhaps, she concedes, "we" were naively idealistic if we really thought we could change the world by dropping acid and smoking dope, living in a free-love commune where no one did the washing up, and setting up free schools where the children were not allowed to learn anything that might benefit them in a future career, but at least "we" tried. And anyway, the point is that "we were there".

Like most veteran commentators of the Sixties, Diski claims credit simply for being alive at the time. She walked the walk (took the drugs, wore the clothes, did the politics) and now she feels entitled to talk the talk, or at any rate write the write. (And thereby cash in the dividend, or Woodstock option.)

The intensely proprietorial attitude of Sixties veterans to "their" era is also manifested by reviewers of Diski's tome. Thus Irma Kurtz in the *Guardian* cannot wait to point out that "if you happened to be there too, you are bound to remember it in your own way" – her being that of an American who had come to find what "one of my classmates from Columbia University, Piri Halasz, first referred to in print as 'swinging London'." Having laboriously declared her (and her classmate's) pioneering interest, Kurtz then com-

plains about the Anglo-centric focus of Diski's book and the absence of any reference to "the Black Power movement, which was of long historical importance". Tut, tut.

In the *Independent* another veteran, Robert Irwin, is disappointed to find "no reference to the hippy trail" or the "retro cults of Beardsley, Mucha and Victorian military uniforms". But he shares Diski's certainty that "the music then was better." His review ends with a plug for his own book about the Sixties.

In the *Mail*, Peter Lewis offers the perspective of the still more elderly veteran with his waspish comment: "Her book's cover is adorned with the CND symbol, because she went on the marches. Excuse me. We were doing that in the Fifties, and bearing the brunt of the ridicule." Ouch.

Perhaps he is piqued at the way Diski, while acknowledging the influence of Ginsberg and the Beats, discounts the radicalism of the 1950s and early 1960s, with her assertion that the "Sixties" only "began in the mid-1960s with the rise of popular culture" and "ended in the mid-1970s" (when Maggie Thatcher, that shining emblem of wimmin's lib and doing your own thing, became Tory leader). But this ignores the popular culture of the 1950s, and, rather oddly since she attaches so much importance to the rock music of "her" era, ignores the jazz, blues and folk by which so much of it was (often to a plagiaristic extent) inspired.

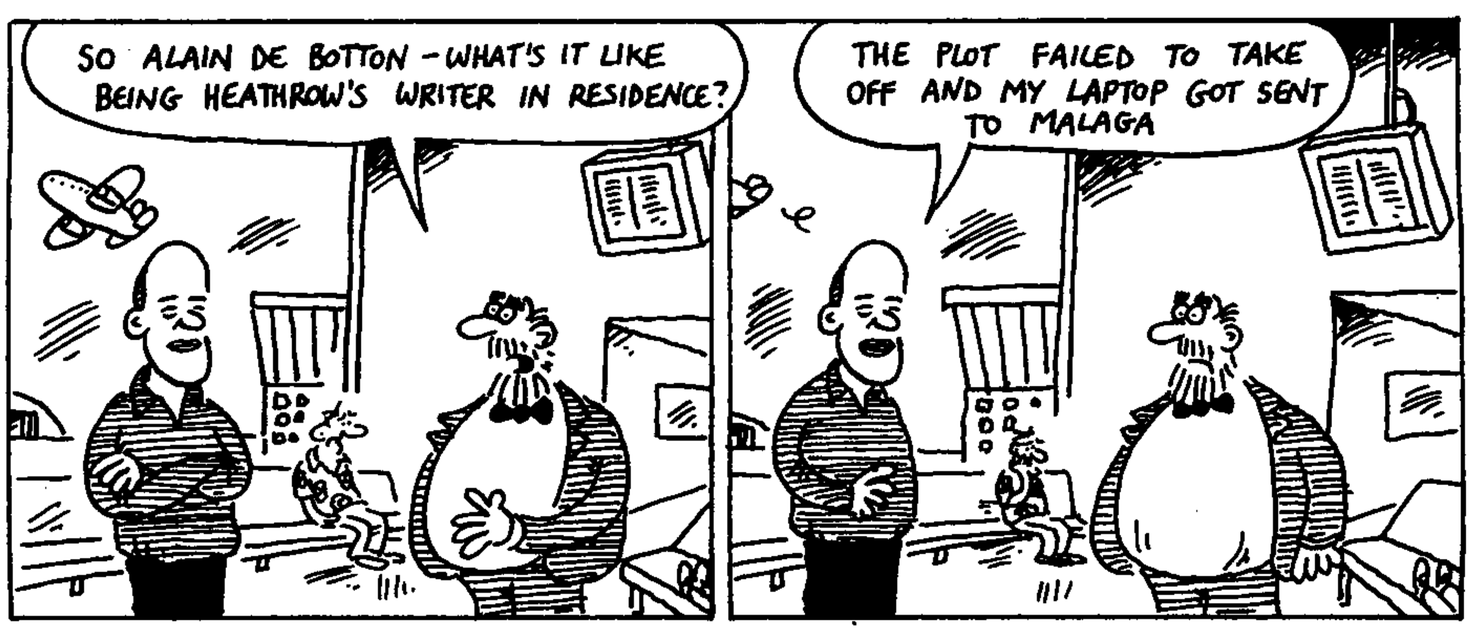
Whenever the Sixties began or ended, the fact remains that the vast majority of the population was unaffected by the antics of the privileged few who took it upon themselves to change the world for their benefit and who later claimed to have personified the period. As Diski admits: "Most people aren't actively engaged in what any given era is later characterised by." (It's easily forgotten that the salient sociological fact about the Sixties was not the drugs or the free love but the fact that it was probably the first decade in which a majority of the population enjoyed access to an indoor toilet.)

Some of Diski's personal anecdotes, especially the ones about her free school and her experiences of anti-psychiatry and mental hospitals, would make interesting entries in an oral history of the period along the lines of Jonathon Green's *Days in the Life*. But most of this book is a mixture of special pleading (we were wrong but we were sincere) and grumpy old whingeing about the youth of today, who have sex and drugs for fun rather than to make a statement or change the world, and who don't seem to appreciate the sacrifices made for them by their venerable elders. Or their music, the philistines.

It's a complaint that sounds remarkably like the one that used to be made about the baby boomers themselves. Could it be that their worst nightmare is coming true, and they are finally turning into their own (grand) parents? As Joni Mitchell might now sing: *"We are stardust. We are golden. / And we have got to get back to the care home."*

ORDER OF THE MOIST GUSSET

■ "Faulks's manly shoulders do not disappoint. At smart dinner parties, women swoon at the sight of Sebastian in full sail, white shirt billowing around his tall, romantic form... It is no discomfort to sit close and listen to that soft baritone and gaze at his melancholy eyes." – Cathy Galvin, *Sunday Times*.


SO ALAIN DE BOTTON - WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING HEATHROW'S WRITER IN RESIDENCE?
THE PLOT FAILED TO TAKE OFF AND MY LAPTOP GOT SENT TO MALAGA

Books & Bookmen

■ POOR Sebastian Faulks did as much as could be expected in exchange for being profiled in the *Sunday Times Magazine*'s cover story: the novelist sportingly dressed up as an improbable City trader for the mag's front, and posed for another, even odder snap that gave the impression he was peeing in a London Underground station.

No doubt he hoped that, in return for these indignities, the interview would highlight his diagnosis of the country's predicament in *A Week in December*, a state-of-the-nation novel (well, state of London, anyway) and first contemporary effort from a writer best known for *Birdsong*.

It was not his seemingly banal views on bankers and the credit crunch that attracted attention, however, but a remarkable diatribe in which he described the Koran as "the rantings of a schizophrenic" and criticised its lack of an "ethical dimension".

Having clearly failed to grasp the "don't waffle about Islam on tape" lesson of the Martin Amis brouhaha Faulks at least moved more swiftly and less truculently to limit the damage. It was "absurd to suggest" the Prophet "suffered from any acute illness", he admitted, offering "a simple and unqualified apology... for anything that has come out sounding crude and intolerant".

A few days later, Fay Weldon was offering a contrasting masterclass in how to play the press game. Another of her gleefully provocative anti- or post-feminist statements – this time that women should do chores such as picking up socks – provided columnists with something to write about; yet sheepish apologies are not required, as it's never clear how much of what she says is fiction – "I lie for the sake of entertainment", she smilingly acknowledged to a later profiler.

■ WITH Gordon Brown's literary career on hold after the four books he rattled out between September 2006 and November 2008, who will take his mantle as Britain's most prolific author?

Step forward Chas Newkey-Burden, friend of Julie Burchill, "unofficial biographer" of Paris Hilton and Amy Winehouse and enthusiastic Amazon reviewer of his own books. This week sees the publication of his *Michael Jackson Legend: 1958-2009*, commissioned by Michael O'Mara three days after the singer's death in June and completed three weeks later.

Two days later on 3 September from the same publisher comes *Simon Cowell: The Unauthorised Biography*. Newkey-Burden then has a month's rest before commencing promotional duties for *Heston Blumenthal: The Biography of the World's Most Brilliant Master Chef* (John Blake) and *Alexandra Burke: A Star is Born* (Metro), both of which hit the shelves on 5 October.

'Bookworm'

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Mad World: Evelyn Waugh and the secrets of Brideshead

Paula Byrne

(Harper Press £25)

IT IS really rather surprising how Evelyn Waugh's relationship with the Starborgling family of Starborgling Court, Loamshire, and its absolute centrality to his literary career, has so far escaped the attention of critics.

In fact, aside from the seventeen authorised biographies, the multi-volume edition of his letters, the ten-part television series presented by Nicholas Snargs, and Lady Stultitia Blodwyn's exquisite memoir, scarcely a single book and barely a dozen or so scholarly articles have dwelt in even the most incidental way on the Starborglings' extraordinary influence on his great masterpiece *Bargshead Revisited*.

Although Waugh had known The Hon. Hyacinth "Fruity" Starborgling (famous for remarking, on the occasion when a crowd of Mayfair debutantes were caught in a hailstorm, "My dear, it didn't rain, it Diored") at Oxford, where they were both members of the Rectum Club, his real introduction to the family of Earl Starborgling, and in particular his daughters the Ladies Mortitia, Venetia and Drusilla, did not come until 1931.

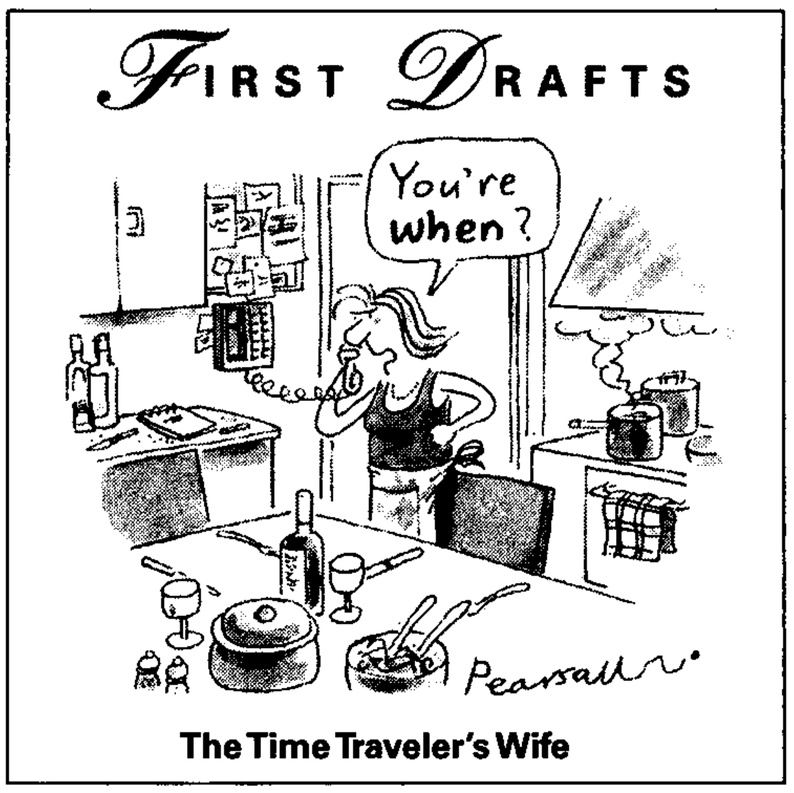
"Darling Bonkers" runs one of his characteristically witty effusions to Lady Venetia from around this time, "I don't suppose you'd let me be your chum, would you? I'm afraid I didn't go to Eton like Fruity and my wretched father is horribly middle-class, but if you could see your way to overlooking this I'd be most fearfully chuffed. Please ask me for Christmas – it would be just too super. Just off to roger a tart, so let's hope the old cock doesn't drop off eh?"

In old age Lady Venetia would remember the sensation that these letters produced at the breakfast table. "He was just so frightfully funny that we all loved him. Of course it was rather sad that he couldn't find anyone of his own class to associate with, but father always said we should be tolerant towards members of the lower orders who got above themselves, and of course he'd been very kind to Piers when they were at Oxford, carrying his bags and doing his essays and so forth, and so whenever anyone found him hiding under the sofa the day after we'd seen him off on the train, we were always terribly amused: it was almost as funny as the time father shot the gamekeeper and the blood dripped all over the antimacassar."

Surprisingly, no previous biographer has ever remarked on Waugh's momentous encounter with Lord Starborgling, which I am able to date to an afternoon in May 1932, when Waugh, entering the gentlemen's lavatory at the Drones Club, found his lordship, well known for his ability to handle servants, engaged with one of the attendants. "Christ, aren't you that ghastly little parvenu who writes smutty letters to my daughters?" Lord Starborgling is supposed to have remarked. No finer example of Waugh's aristocratic beau ideal could have been imagined. It is not exaggerating to say that the scene resonates throughout Waugh's later work. Clearly when Sir Basil Digby-Vane-Cretin in *Next Stop White's* is loudly sick into the waste-paper basket, Waugh has in mind the antique vomiting basins designed by the third earl and brought out at ceremonial occasions such as the annual Roasting (always spelt "rosting") of the Tenants. Similarly the celebrated scene in *Bargshead* in which a footman is sacked for referring to "writing paper" rather than "note-paper" can only have its origins in... [*continues for several hundred pages*]

...In later life, although Waugh maintained a charming correspondence with his old friends – "Darling Bonkers" he wrote as late as 1959, "isn't life foul? Even the Pope is a bloody liberal" – it was clear that the heady days of their first acquaintance could be no more.

Lady Mortitita, who died in 1981, became an authority on port wine and sitting in chairs. Lady Venetia, alternatively, made a puzzling and short-lived late marriage to the flamboyant Sir Robin Gaye-Ladd, who is thought to have left her his collection of *duchesse brisees*. Lady Drusilla, after enjoying well-publicised affairs with the Dalai Lama, His Holiness Pope John-Paul II, Rolf Harris and many other prominent men, devoted herself to the Mastership of the local Vole-hounds, in which capacity she was an august presence on the Starborgling lawn on meet days until her 109th year ...[*continues endlessly*]



The Time Traveler's Wife

SPCK LATEST

■ GREAT NEWS for the 32 bookshop workers sacked after the Texan Brewer brothers took over the SPCK chain of Christian bookstores (see *Eyes* 1214 and 1216). They have been awarded a "substantial payout" after a year-long fight for justice.

The struggling SPCK handed over the shops to the Brewers' St Stephen the Great charitable trust in 2006. The new owners soon alarmed both staff and customers by pulling non-Christian texts such as the Qur'an (very useful to clergy and theological students) from their shelves and demanding that staff work longer hours for no extra pay.

In 2008, many staff were sacked by email or got the news second-hand. They were told by Mark and Philip Brewer to contact the Texas Bankruptcy Court for any money they were owed (including pay for June 2008, redundancy money and in one case, maternity pay). The brothers claimed that the staff had been transferred to work for a US-based company, separate from the charitable trust, which owned the shops. However, the US courts later threw out the Brewers' bankruptcy filing and a judge approved a motion for sanctions against Mark Brewer, who is a lawyer, for making a false bankruptcy filing in bad faith.

With the workers seeking an employment tribunal, the Charity Commission exercised its powers to appoint an interim manager for the charitable trust, which still owned assets, including shop properties in several cathedral cities. That manager was then able to agree a settlement with the former shop staff. Union USDAW, which represented the workers, says they will get a pay out this month and should get the full sum (exactly how much remains confidential) once the shops are sold off.

Pseuds Corner

As you turn off the M1 for the stadium, a sign says Welcome to Bletchley (now, apparently, part of Milton Keynes): Home of the Codebreakers. It is where the Enigma device was developed to break German war codes. Football's equivalent is back, ready to crack another division.

NICK TOWNSEND interviews MK Dons manager PAUL INCE – *Sunday Times*

To be or not to be. That was the question posed by one great man. It's a tough one. My choice? To be.

I love being. There's so much wisdom in it. You wake up in the morning and you think, Hey, isn't it great just being? But not to be would be just as great, too, I guess.

You know what? My life is good because I am not passive about it. I invest in what is real. Like real people, to do real things, for the real me...[continues]

GWYNETH PALTROW – *Vanity Fair*

Watching him [Andrew Flintoff] in the nets at a sunlit Oval yesterday, taking it easy in fielding practice and bowling only a handful of deliveries before retreating to the sidelines, it was impossible not to be reminded of the final scene of the film El Cid, when the dead body of Charlton Heston is propped and strapped in the saddle in order to provide a symbolic leadership for his troops.

RICHARD WILLIAMS – *Guardian*

This has always been Von Trier's theme: nothing worse than a person who believes in their natural capacity for good.

Or, in other words: close-up, in slow-motion, the real is horrifying. For the greatest shot in this film isn't the clitorectomy, nor the ejaculating penis. It's when the camera continues and continues, in the full lucidity of HD, into the frightening, unconcerned murk of an elegant glass vase beside a hospital bed, where the stalks of some pretty flowers are gradually rotting. And it continues, without going out of focus.

ADAM THIRLWELL – *Guardian*

Dr David Starkey was paid £30,000 as the curator of an exhibition about Henry VIII for the British Library.

The historian said he had reduced his normal fee. 'I'd normally charge £50,000 to £100,000 for work of that kind, if I was working for a commercial outfit' he said. 'I regard it as pro bono work for a public body. It's a public benefit.'

Sunday Times

I never go the beach without my knitted rainbow beach bag filled with Hawaiian Tropic suncream, Phyto Plage products for hair, Indian leather sandals, a tie-dye top, a notebook and pen, a book (Edith Wharton) and of course diamonds, because they are on fire in the sun, the best place for them.

Jewellery designer SOLANGE AZAGURY-PARTRIDGE's 'holiday must-haves' – Independent

CONTRIBUTORS: Herbie Knott, Hazel Marks, Richard Whittell, Michael Powell, D. Carter, J.C. Pearsall.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

SATANIC PANIC

It was 20 years ago today...

IT IS 20 years since the notion of Satanic ritual abuse was first introduced to a horrified audience of social workers, police officers, paediatricians, child psychologists and others working in child protection, together with adult psychotherapists at a conference in Reading in September 1989.

The idea that there was a newly discovered and unspeakably evil form of child abuse was imported from the United States. There followed a series of conferences, seminars and workshops around the UK, attended by thousands of practitioners, after which dozens of allegations of ritual abuse were investigated, from Kent to Aberdeen, including the infamous cases in Nottingham, Rochdale and the Orkneys covered extensively in *Private Eye* throughout the 1990s.

For a few years in the late 1990s and early 2000s the believers quietly went to ground. There was a backlash here and in the US, where multi-million dollar compensation lawsuits were won against therapists for implanting false memories of childhood sexual abuse, including Satanic ritual abuse. Believers stopped talking about Satanic or ritual abuse and instead started using the terms organised or extreme abuse.

But there is now a growing and dangerous fight back in the form of books and conferences featuring speakers defiantly and proudly proclaiming the existence of "ritual abuse" and how to treat "survivors".

The believers are mainly therapists and survivors who have apparently belatedly recovered memories while in therapy (many of whom have become therapists). They are promoting a whole new field of "trauma" therapy in how to treat survivors of ritual abuse, who are diagnosed as suffering from Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder. Victims are said to develop a number of "alters" or other personalities, to whom they switch to help them bury the memories (see *Eyes passim*).

The latest fashionable theory in this psychobabble psychotherapy is that these survivors are victims of "mind control" exerted by the perpetrators using the "alters" to control the victim to make them suppress or disbelieve the memories of the abuse.

The treatments, which often involve counselling all these alters, necessarily involve many years of very expensive therapy. In a new book, published in the US, *Ritual Abuse in the Twenty First Century*, one survivor wrote of their 17-year journey in therapy. At what cost?

In the UK this year there have already been a string of conferences, seminars and training sessions; and more are planned, with delegates paying between £200 and £700 a time. Topics range around theories of trauma, dissociative disorders, attachment (which means lack of attachment to parents due to childhood abuse), ritual abuse and mind control – all related to previously forgotten extreme childhood sexual abuse.

In May about 200 people (paying up to £285 each) attended a conference in Derbyshire organised by TAG, the Trauma and Abuse Group, and RAINS, Ritual Abuse Information Network and Support (led by veteran ritual abuse campaigner and psychiatrist Joan Coleman – see *Eyes passim*).

The conference was on the subjects of early life trauma, childhood sexual abuse and ritual abuse, and entitled Attachment, Trauma and Dissociation. It was important, the programme said, because "many survivors encounter misunderstanding, denial, disbelief and misdiagnosis".

Speakers included Dr Alison Miller, a psychologist in private practice in British Columbia, Canada, who spoke on how to treat victims of ritual abuse and mind control. In her chapter in the book *Ritual Abuse in the Twenty First Century*, which is being heavily promoted in the UK, she wrote about how victims of ritual abuse and mind control survivors develop numerous "alters". In a "typical group", she explained, "by the age of six months the child has at minimum 18 to 20 alters".

Valerie Sinason, an adult psychoanalyst and child psychotherapist, and director of the Clinic

for Dissociative Studies in Harley Street, London, who claims to have worked with 300 ritual abuse survivors, was billed to speak on working with learning disability, ritual abuse, DID and mind control. Sinason was back on her feet in June, along with other associates from her clinic, offering a four-day continuing professional development course in London (maximum 15 participants, cost up to £620 per person).

But the big event of the year will be a conference on Ritual Abuse and Mind Control, in London on 25 and 26 September, co-organised by Sinason's Clinic for Dissociative Studies (more than 100 delegates expected; cost up to £250 each).

The line up includes Ellen Lacter, a clinical psychologist from California (see *Eye* 1213) on Torture-based Mind Control and Overcoming Mind Control; Graeme Galton, a psychotherapist at Sinason's clinic, on the topic Just Leave out the Word Ritual; and Sinason with a keynote speech on 20 Years of Work with Ritual Abuse: Where are we now?

The conference and training circuit is how the Satanic panic entered mainstream child protection and adult psychotherapy practice 20 years ago. This resulted in 84 police investigations in the UK, with families and friends being falsely accused of horrendous child abuse and in some cases, such as Rochdale, leading to children being taken into care for years. In 1994 a government-commissioned inquiry concluded there was no evidence of ritual abuse.

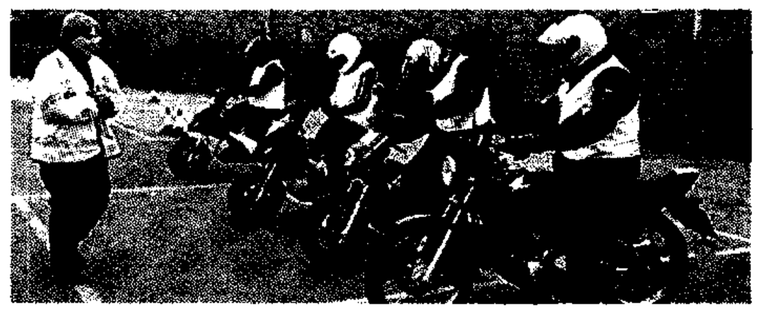
A new book published by Karnac Books in the UK, *Forensic Aspects of Dissociative Identity Disorder*, strongly endorses a belief in ritual abuse with contributions on "Satanist Ritual Abuse and the Problem of Credibility" by Coleman, various chapters on DID relating to ritual abuse and concluding with articles by Sinason and Lacter about ritual abuse and mind control. The book, co-edited by Galton, is being heavily promoted by Sinason's clinic and on her website.

Bizarrely it includes an interview which spells out emphatically this total absence of evidence. Chris Healey, a retired head of CID in Portsmouth, describes his investigations into five cases of alleged ritual abuse. "I've never come across a case of ritual abuse that was proven," he said. "I've been looking for 15 years, and I've tried very hard to find proof. I've dug up fields, set up cameras, and looked down wells where bones were supposed to have been thrown, and I've found nothing that can be independently linked to the allegations. In my experience these allegations have always ended in a dead end."

And yet the bandwagon rolls on...

MOTORBIKE TRAINING

L on wheels



NOT a moment too soon, the Commons transport committee has announced an inquiry into the great motorcycle testing fiasco outlined in *Eye* 1242.

More evidence has emerged of how the bungled introduction of the test back in April has risked the lives of inexperienced bikers, wasted millions and is wrecking the motorcycle training industry. The cock-up can be safely laid at the door of the so-called Driving Standards Agency – aka the Dubious Standards Agency – and its chief executive, Rosemary Thew.

Thew's insistence on implementing in full the European second driving licence directive (EDLD 2) has already wasted £71m on building new off-road "multi-purpose test centres". The new test includes an emergency stop and a dangerous swerve procedure at a speed of 32mph, obviously at least two mph in excess of the legal speed limit for the residential areas where the old on-road tests were conducted. Thew's currently building her multi-purpose test centres where the new test can be performed so examiners and learners can perform Brussels' elaborate acrobatics without breaking the law.

Not only that, but there's mounting evidence that the current scarcity of test centres is putting the lives of inexperienced motorbike learners at risk. Thew has built only 45 of the promised 75 establishments, forcing many learners to travel many miles, often along busy dual carriage ways. There is only one test centre for the whole of the Birmingham conurbation and it's in... Wolverhampton; and London has a grand total of, er, two. For example, if you live in Truro, a hazardous one-way odyssey of 90 miles along grockle-infested highways to Exeter awaits. Motorcycle trainers are often faced with the unenviable task of travelling long distances back to base from centres with motorcyclists who have just failed their test and are therefore officially unfit to be on the roads.

Naturally, Thew was warned about all this when rider organisations tried to knock some sense into her at a meeting last year. Her intransigence is also having a predictable impact on the training industry. According to the Motor Cycle Industry Association, the country's 650 training companies are reporting a drop in new riders signing up of 60 percent. Many riders are deciding to forego the pleasure of risking their lives to get a full licence, preferring instead to tootle around with "L" plates on 125cc-powered bikes, which they still legally can.

Three training companies in Glasgow have gone bust in recent weeks. And there's been a corresponding fall in the number of trainees taking tests. In May and June, reports *British Dealer News*, 13,000 fewer Module Two on-road practical tests were taken, a fall of 65 percent on the same period last year. Not to mention the £1.5m in lost fees to the DSA. It also seems the DSA has run out of the cash it allocated for the new test, with at least 20 of the promised testing centres still to be built.

Thanks to Thew's stubbornness, measures which she claimed would make Britain's roads safer for motorcyclists have made them appreciably more dangerous. And all for a problem which does not exist. Recent years have seen a dramatic decrease in the number of motorcyclists being killed or injured.

In announcing their inquiry, MPs on the transport committee will be asking four important questions: has the DSA implemented the test appropriately and correctly? Are the tests safe? Is the number of test centres adequate and locations satisfactory? What is the impact of the recent changes? No doubt a lot of hot air will be generated before the MPs reach the obvious answers: "no" to the first three questions, and "bloody dreadful" to the last.

AFGHAN CORRUPTION

Del Boy and Babs from Texas

Barbara Spiers

BRITISH politicians often highlight how corruption in Hamid Karzai's Afghan government makes it hard for western troops to stabilise the country. But a trial in the US next month will suggest an American private security company has been a conduit for much of the corruption, apparently defrauding $17m in reconstruction funds from the US government.

Until recently, United States Protection and Investigations (USPI) was one of the biggest private security operators in Afghanistan, with more than 3,000 armed men guarding the UN, World Bank, various roads, government buildings and other premises. This was an impressive force for a firm run by two Texan grandparents, Del and Barbara Spier, who as recently as 2002 had filed for bankruptcy when the small, Houston-based private investigations company they then ran had gone bust.

The Spiers' weren't stony broke for long, however. Their fortunes changed rapidly when they set up USPI and promptly signed a multi-million dollar security deal with the Louis Berger Group, which was part of the internationally-funded rebuilding effort in Afghanistan. USPI was to guard a 300-mile stretch of road between Kabul and Kandahar that Louis Berger was rebuilding.

Hey presto Del and Babs, proud grandparents of five, were back in business. But how did they become millionaires so quickly? They did so by hiring guards from the Afghan Ministry of the Interior for $5 a day – in reality the militia of various unsavoury warlords, including the notorious General Din Mohammad Jurat. Then, informants allege, they used crude but creative accounting techniques to systematically rip off the US government.

US authorities investigated when informants told them that illiterate Afghan soldiers signing on for work with USPI by thumbprint were using every finger on their hand to make extra prints, so generating bills for imaginary staff. Raids on USPI offices then revealed evidence of fake invoices for car rental and petrol purchases that were also billed to the US.

The Spiers were arrested in Texas late last year; but whatever the outcome of their $17m fraud trial, the damage has already been done in Afghanistan, where rule by corrupt warlords is entrenched.

When things began to turn sour with USPI, the Louis Berger Group looked at others who might be able to do the security work for them, including Britain's leading private security company, Aegis, currently in charge of coordinating security companies in Iraq. According to a memo from a Louis Berger manager in Afghanistan, however, even Aegis would have had to work with the same "ragtag Ministry of Interior soldiers".

The memo, obtained by the American investigative magazine *Mother Jones*, said it would have been "the intention of Aegis to use the same Ministry of Interior / Afghan National Police that USPI are using. Considering the probable flow of money, it would be a security risk to the project, Louis Berger Group and Aegis if they did anything that disrupted the flow of money." The importance of the "flow of money" suggests the security contract acted like a protection racket with the warlords.

The Spiers' trial comes too late to help the many guards who have been killed while working for USPI. The firm has been widely criticised for incompetence and meanness, supplying guards with defective weapons and vehicles. Many Afghan guards died in shoot outs with various Taliban and warlords, and former Royal Green Jacket's Sergeant David Addison was kidnapped and killed by Taliban while working as a USPI security manager in 2005.

HEALTH CHECK

NHS DIGITAL STRATEGY

Foster care

THE recent boost to KPMG's financial fortunes courtesy of the Department of Health (£5m in fees for the first six months of this year: the amount it usually earns from the department in a year) is of course in no way related to the fact that its former commissioning chief, Mark Britnell (pictured), is about to join the bean-counting giant.

After all, these contracts would have been put in place before Britnell, the brains behind the so-called "world class commissioning" (or massive health privatisation), quit in June to take up his job as KPMG's director of healthcare Europe on 1 October.

KPMG's latest nice little earner (another £350,000 of taxpayers' money) is to review the NHS "digital strategy" which includes the patient helpline NHS Direct and NHS Choices, the controversial comparative website designed to help patients choose between hospitals (one of which has to be private, naturally).

Curiously KPMG has brought in Dr Foster (*Eyes passim*) to help. It was of course Dr Foster Intelligence which helped the DoH develop Choices in the first place, in a costly move which the Commons public accounts committee later condemned for breaking almost every rule in the book designed to protect taxpayers. So when the Choices contract came up for renewal in July 2008, Foster Intelligence duly lost out to the *Eye*'s old friends at Capita.

This has left Foster in a bit of a pickle. Not only is the value of Capita's contract worth significantly more – £60m for three years with the option to extend it for another year, compared with the paltry £10m for 18 months that Foster received – but the website's transfer also meant 55 staff and 82 contractors migrating to Capita. Not to be outdone, another branch of Dr F, Foster Research, decided to resuscitate the company's "Good Hospital Guide" as a rival to NHS Choices.

So why hire the hardly impartial Foster for the review? Could it possibly be related to a meeting in June between Foster's Tim Kelsey and Mark Britnell (still wearing his DoH commissioning hat) and David Edmonds, chairman of NHS Direct, entitled "discussions on digital strategy"? Until 2007 Britnell was also a non-executive director of, er, Dr Foster.

ISTCS

Fair cop?

WHEN health minister Mike O'Brien said recently that "the future use of Independent Sector Treatment Centres (ISTCs)... will be fairer and on the same terms as other providers of NHS services", his statement was welcomed. But was he admitting that the ISTCs had secured their contracts unfairly in the first place?

A Department of Health spokesman told the *Eye*: "I don't think we'd ever say that." But after examining the evidence, most people would conclude that they did.

The government bought more than £1.5bn-worth of operations from the ISTCs, which are effectively privately run mini-hospitals. The private health companies sold operations that were around 10 percent more expensive than the NHS, a price O'Brien's predecessors were happy to pay to "stimulate" this new private health market. The firms were also guaranteed payment for a certain number of operations, whether or not they carried them out.

Even though O'Brien announced that this "unfairness" would now end, he had to admit that it would not be ending right away. The NHS will still have to pay the firms around £200m to buy the clinics they built, because the contracts were written to make sure the companies did not bear the cost of these buildings if their contracts were not renewed. And the NHS will also have to pay another £200m for operations that did not happen – between 10 and 15 percent of the total amount of operations in the contracts. Moreover, the "first wave" of ISTC contracts, issued before O'Brien decided to play fair, will not end until after 2010.

UNITED HEALTH

Town hall toadies

WHILE the American private health firm UnitedHealth is keen to win more contracts from the NHS in Britain, back in the US it is mobilising its staff to oppose President Obama's proposals for a small public health system.

The company hired Tony Blair's former adviser Simon Stevens, architect of the New Labour reforms that opened up Britain's NHS to private firms like UnitedHealth; and Stevens now sits on the main board of the Minneapolis-based company – the same board that authorised a campaign against a "public option" in Obama's proposed healthcare reforms.

Officially UnitedHealth is neutral about the plans; but it is nevertheless encouraging staff to attend the town hall meetings in the US where public demonstrations have attacked the reforms as "socialist" and as "bad" as Britain's NHS.

Despite the firm's professed neutrality, UnitedHealth's "Talking Points" briefing to staff attending the meetings says: "A government-run health plan would be a roadblock to meaningful healthcare reform."

UnitedHealth funds another front group that is organising town hall protests. Called the "Campaign for an American solution", it openly opposes Obama's "public option". According to its publicity material, a "government-run plan" would suck thousands of dollars out of Americans' wallets while slashing spending on hospitals by 30 percent. UnitedHealth also owns "independent" think tank The Lewin Group which supplies Republican senators with scary facts and figures about the danger of a "public option" for US health. UnitedHealth's main income in the US of course comes from health insurance, so it has every reason to fear a good public health service.

As well as wanting to take more money from Britain's NHS, it has a habit of squeezing cash directly from the sick. In January it agreed a $50m settlement with US regulators over claims that it had systematically overcharged Americans for their insurance.

GOBBLEDEGOOK

Stupid letter of the week

***EYE* reader James Kennard was disappointed to receive a letter from Easyjet informing him that the firm would not be compensating him for its cock-up over his flight booking. Still, if he needed further clarification at least Easyjet offered a suggestion in the letter for what he could do:**

"I do hope I have been able to answer your question fully; if I have not, please <as-html> <ahref="https://easyjet.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/easyjet.cfg/php/enduser/acct_login.php">click here</as-html> and we will be more than happy to assist you further.

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

A law school unto itself

CARDIFF University's Law School has just spent a staggering £250,000 on a pointless three-year legal battle in a pitiful attempt to wrongly fail one its own students.

During the process lecturers on the university's own Bar Vocational Course (BVC) sat in judgment on and – surprise, surprise! – found in favour of their own behaviour and erroneous decisions. Did Cardiff's law experts really have to be told by a high court judge that this doesn't constitute a "fair" hearing? Worse, in its efforts not to pass "troublesome" student Alice Clarke, by trying to persuade a high court-approved "independent" examiner to downgrade her 71 percent flying pass mark, the university also flouted the judge's order.

The details were revealed by Mr Justice Wyn Williams last month when he found in favour of Ms Clarke (pictured), now 42 and a mother of two.

Ms Clarke was a qualified nurse who was married to a cancer specialist when she decided to retrain as a lawyer in order to combine law with her medical training and become a coroner. Matters seemed to be going well with her achieving marks of between 70 and 85 percent for her formative post-graduate assessments for her Bar exams. Then, she claimed, she noted a marked change in attitude towards her on the part of certain staff and she subsequently failed her three exams: professional ethics, negotiation and advanced criminal.

She thought it no coincidence that the change in attitude coincided with her written support for an overseas Jewish student who had alleged racial discrimination against one of her lecturers, Dr Robin Wheeler. She had copied it to another of her tutors, Andrew Jerram, who had a close relationship with Dr Wheeler. Mr Justice Wyn Williams said there was no independent evidence to support her suspicions that this had led to her being treated unfairly. But she had clearly been treated appallingly.

When Ms Clarke requested a breakdown of the marks for professional ethics, she was told there had been an "error" and that she had in fact secured a pass. When she persisted she found that an original assessment of 83 percent had been crossed through, and a mark of 37 percent substituted. This was later changed to a bare 50 percent pass, on realising the "mistake".

When it came to the negotiation and advanced criminal examinations, however, the Law School initially stuck to its guns and said she had failed. First Ms Clarke appealed to the "extenuating circumstances committee", complaining that immediately before the negotiation assessment she had been confronted by Andrew Jerram, the course leader, and Hannah Walsh, who was to conduct the assessment, accusing her of ignoring instructions to bring in certain books and demanding that she made the three-hour return trip to her Swansea home that day to get them. The row over the books, said Ms Clarke, caused her distress which may have influenced the way she performed immediately afterwards in the negotiation examination. Although she had been allowed to retake the negotiation assessment, her mark of 62 percent was downgraded to 50 percent because it was a "retake". On the committee deciding her fate were… Andrew Jerram and Hannah Walsh, the very people she was complaining about and who rejected Ms Clarke's account.

Then the assessment marks were considered by the university's exam board, chaired by none other than Mr Jerram and including Ms Walsh. It confirmed the negotiation marks and the failure awarded by Dr Wheeler for her advanced criminal exam. When she appealed a reconvened board sat, this time with Mr Jerram and Ms Walsh declaring an interest and only providing highly disputed "factual information". Again it upheld the decision.

Thus, in July 2006 Alice Clarke launched her judicial review seeking to quash the findings of both the exam boards and the extenuating circumstances committee. In October the proceedings were adjourned on the basis that the advanced criminal assessment which had been videoed could be anonymised, compared with others, and remarked by an independent outside examiner, a Ms Sutton. Far from failing Ms Clarke, as Dr Wheeler had done, Ms Sutton awarded Ms Clarke 71 percent. But instead of communicating this to the student, as per the court order, the university tried to persuade Ms Sutton to change her mind. In the end, the examiner said she was only prepared to revise the grade down to 65 percent. This episode, said Mr Justice Wyn Williams, was against the spirit of high court order and did not reflect well on the university or its lawyers.

Even then the university's examination board overruled the independent examiner and again failed Ms Clarke. The university communicated this in a short letter which failed to disclose the independent examiner's mark or the fact that the university had been corresponding with the examiner behind Ms Clarke's back.

In the meantime, the university had put Ms Clarke's video out to yet another examiner, connected to the university, for "moderation" and Ms Clarke was finally passed on the lowest of grades, 51 percent. Just enough to give her a pass and perhaps avoid this sorry affair being canvassed in open court.

Finally, in January this year she was told officially by the university's awards and progress committee that she had now been awarded her postgraduate Bar diploma with a classification of "competent". Lincoln's Inn had supported her throughout her battle, and was finally able to call her to the Bar in February, nearly three-and-a-half years after she should have become a barrister.

Her 51 percent mark was grudging, graceless and far from ideal for a bright student. But it opened the door for the university to try to argue that she should drop her judicial review because she had now passed her exams and was a member of the Bar. But for her, there was still the thorny issue of the negotiation assessment, which was emblematic of the unfairness with which she had been treated – and the fact that her high mark in her retake would be disregarded. Mr Justice Wyn Williams agreed, quashing the findings of both the committee and the examination boards, some of whose members had acted as witnesses, as well as judge and jury of themselves.

Patrick Green, the barrister who represented her throughout the case, told Mr Justice Wyn Williams that the university's conduct was astonishing. The judge clearly agreed. Given that the university seems to have done everything it could to destroy Ms Clarke's career, all eyes are now on the Bar Council to see if it will look into the University's conduct.

MARKET FORCES

You've been Tesco'd

TESCO was caught fibbing last week after publishing leaflets claiming that there was demand for a new store in Manningtree, Essex.

The Advertising Standards Authority banned the leaflets when it was revealed that just 38 out of 440 people interviewed thought the area could do with a supermarket – and only 20 of them thought a new Tesco would be good. Despite this setback, the relentless march of Tesco goes on…

● Opposition is already mounting to newly announced plans for a Tesco Metro store in **Liverpool's Hope Street**. The historic street is home to two cathedrals and was described in recent "Visit Liverpool" adverts as the "beating heart of the city".

City councillors have urged Tesco to abandon the plans. Can they rely on regeneration quango Liverpool Vision for support? The quango's board includes none other than Tesco CEO, Sir Terry Leahy!

● A new city centre store opened in **Cambridge** last week – despite threatening to cause traffic chaos with its deliveries. Tesco pushed ahead with opening the shop on Mill Road, despite losing a planning battle over a building extension and an alcohol licensing application. Mill Road is a narrow but busy thoroughfare, where the city council is spending £400,000 to calm traffic after more than 100 accidents, many involving pedestrians or cyclists, in the past few years.

Tesco plans to bring three 8m trucks a day to its store, with deliveries taking up to 40 minutes; yet last month it was still insisting it would deliver to the front of the shop, in open defiance of planning restrictions, blocking off half the street and causing traffic jams and risky overtaking. "We will deliver to the front of the store as the previous occupants did and as do most retailers on Mill Road," insisted a spokeswoman.

Campaigners sought an injunction to force the council to stop the deliveries, which was refused after Tesco gave assurances it would deliver to the back of the shop instead – although since that involves taking the lorries through one-way residential streets, on a route Tesco itself said was unworkable, it's hardly a big improvement.

● Tesco's latest grab for green credibility – setting up 30 allotments for hire next to one of its Dobbies Garden Centres in Lancashire – picked up plenty of headlines, but it hasn't gone down well with vegetable growers in Suffolk, where Tesco's plans for a new superstore in **Hadleigh** include building a car park over the Bridge Street allotments.

The Hadleigh Society, and much of the local community, have been fighting off Tesco almost constantly since 1999. A public inquiry rejected Tesco's first plans in 2001, but back it sprang in 2003 with a scheme to "compulsory purchase" the allotments. That was rejected by a planning inspector in 2005. Undaunted, Tesco came back with more plans last year, again planning to tarmac over the productive allotments. Will it never learn?

● In **Leeds**, meanwhile, a man was shocked to be sent a letter from the council thanking him for his comments in support of a controversial new Tesco in the city. Brian Roche told local media that he had never sent a letter or even taken sides in the row over the planned **Oakwood** superstore.

The letter received by the council bore his name (misspelled) and address, handwritten above a typed statement supporting Tesco's application. Leeds City Council is now investigating whether any other letters sent in during the consultation were fake and is asking anyone who gets a letter of receipt for a missive they didn't send to contact planners immediately.

The tally currently stands at 450 letters objecting to the plan to knock down an existing Tesco and neighbouring DIY store to build a giant Tesco, and 417 in favour. Objectors fear the huge store would spoil the conservation area and kill off other local shops. Tesco admits handing out prepared letters for supporters to sign but denied any involvement in using Mr Roche's name and address.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

MONEY, it is claimed, has no smell. Certainly for politicians. Still, it is surprising to see squeaky-clean David Cameron welcoming as a new Tory donor perennial City bad boy David "Spotty" Rowland. But then Rowland handed over a £1m cheque in June and promises "further substantial donations".

An *Eye* favourite pre-dating even that other Tory mega-donor Michael Ashcroft, Rowland single-handedly changed more aspects of the City takeover rules than any other player. He is also a man who, having made and kept his considerable fortune offshore and UK tax-free from the get-go almost 40 years ago, suddenly has concern for "the economic future of Britain". And who presumably, until very recently, as a long-time resident of Guernsey and Monaco, did not vote in many UK elections – he now says he has taken up residence in London. A donor with "a passionate concern for liberty", he made his reputation trampling on the rights of shareholders.

As with Lord Ashcroft, there should be much focus on just how "resident" the Rowland fortune may be for UK tax purposes, despite the fact that "Spotty" and his children, such as Jonathan "Jellyworks" Rowland (who led the way with a £6,500 donation in January) of dotcom boom and bust fame, may have homes here.

Rowland Snr left Britain for France in 1970 just before he was 25, clutching a cheque for £2.8m – worth around £35m today – with no intention of paying any UK tax. He remained outside the UK for the next five years and then alternatively had a home here and/or limited his visits to the 90-day rule to escape the confiscatory Labour tax regime or even the more benign later versions. His UK companies were first controlled by companies to be found in the Bahamas and Panama. He later favoured Luxembourg and the British Virgin islands.

From 1975 Rowland, now 64, held UK directorships until 2000. However, company documents stated his business was controlled via a discretionary family trust of which he was described as "a discretionary object". This may well have been the MA Rowland Settlement Trust, the beneficiaries of which were later described as "the family members of DJ Rowland". More recently a new family trust surfaced – the Rowland Purpose Trust 2001. It would probably be safe to assume that at least one of the purposes of that trust is the legal avoidance of UK tax. During the 1980s, Rowland moved to Monaco before moving on to Guernsey, but in the 90s he had a London address.

Given the long period he spent living outside the UK, the Tories' latest big donor – like their "banker" Ashcroft – would have been able to either legitimately establish a new tax domicile of choice abroad and/or to have established discretionary trusts to own all his assets, which would be safe from any UK tax other than on remitted income even if he became resident for UK tax purposes. This is a matter the Tories may want to clarify – or maybe not. If resident, Rowland, like Ashcroft, is likely to want a dog in the fight about how a Tory chancellor or a revised electoral law will treat "non-doms", those with offshore trusts or non-UK taxpayers. A million or three could make for a very good investment.

Rowland explained that he had returned to London in order to be a permissible donor – ie one eligible to vote. Which raises the question: did he do so before he made his June donation? Was he on the 2008 electoral register, and if so where? Certainly he has yet to list a UK address for any new UK directorship since March 2000.

Profiles of Rowland refer in passing to his controversial or colourful City past but either gloss over or – because they predate electronic databases – are blissfully unaware of the details. Wilful blindness to such a generous benefactor is probably encouraged in Tory circles.

So let's go back to the 70s, when "Spotty" earned his *Private Eye* nickname and his reputation as a genuine "enfant terrible" for the pinstriped gents who then tried to regulate the City.

Rowland hit the City in November 1968, aged 23, with a property-dealing venture, Fordham Investment Group. Fordham was soon a "hot stock" as the young son of a south London scrap metal dealer reflected the mood of the 60s "go-go" era. Fordham grew by acquisition and Rowland moved into selling property bonds to retail investors. But some of those he did business with attracted unfavourable comment. So too did his aggressive sales techniques for selling the property bonds.

By late 1969 the Fordham price had dropped by two thirds. In March 1970 Rowland stunned the stock market when he sold his 18 percent stake for almost twice the then market price and headed for Paris, leaving Fordham shareholders to fend for themselves under the considerably less talented Reg Rowland (no relation). The lesser Rowland dropped £1m on his £2.8m purchase a month later when Fordham became part of the Slater Walker empire. Deals like this influenced subsequent rules designed to require a bid for any purchaser of more than 30 percent of a company.

Within a year Rowland was back winding up the City and rewriting the relatively new Takeover Code with a contested bid for property-rich Williams Hudson. The bid was made by a company Rowland controlled through the Bahamas. Uproar ensued when Rowland bought more than 40 percent of Williams Hudson in the stock market while offering small shareholders the unattractive option of loan stock in his company Adepton.

The Takeover Panel intervened and ordered Rowland to offer a cash alternative so that all shareholders were treated equally. Rowland had not broken any rules; but the panel indicated its concern about future takeover bids being decided in the market harming the rights of those not quick enough to sell.

In 1972 the Takeover Panel was forced to take action after another Rowland market coup. This time the target was timber group Venesta International. Rowland bought a large share stake after a takeover bid had been rejected. When Venesta accepted a higher offer which Rowland decided was inadequate, he took his stake to just over 50 percent, thereby frustrating the bidder and depriving the minority of any bid. Venesta complained that Rowland had misled them and the panel over his intentions. The panel did not agree and accepted that he was entitled to protect his investment. But it made clear its intention to prevent future market coups "in which the rest of the shareholders have no interest and the achievement of which would bring them no benefit".

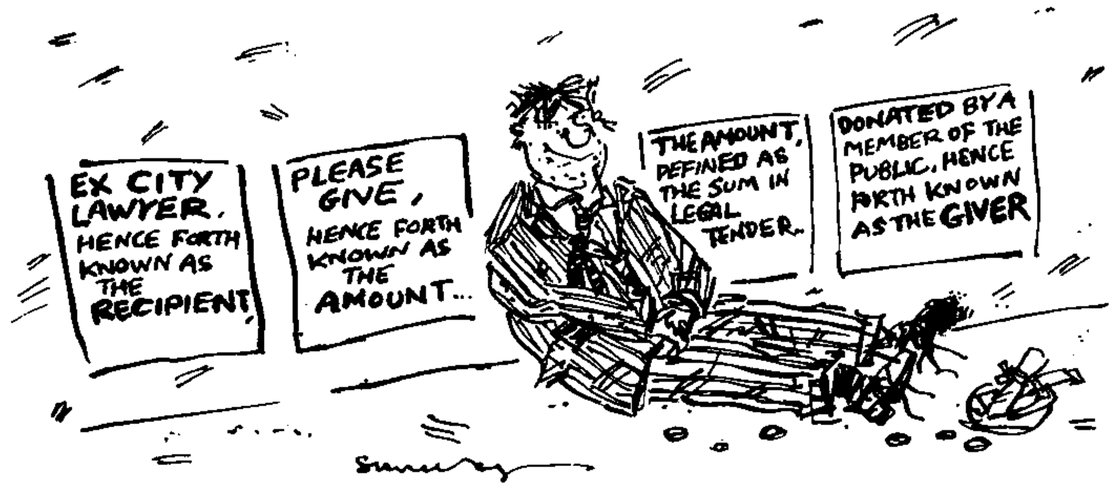
Rowland had bought into Venesta through Consolidated Signal, a sleepy investment company where Adepton had acquired control, leaving a minority shareholding. Rowland had sold its assets to finance the Venesta purchase. That was fine until Venesta went bust in 1976 after losing heavily on a French venture. By 1978 the minority shareholders were on the march after Rowland proposed selling the share stake and valuable tax losses for just £1,000 to an associated company. The price was later changed to £632,000, including the value of the losses.

Rowland was not impressed by the demands for information and transparency and decided to terminate the liberty of activist Martin Moir to access company documents. Moir responded by demanding shareholders lobby the government for a Companies Act investigation. Consolidated was liquidated in 1981.

Adepton, renamed Williams Hudson Group, like Venesta did not have a happy end. Rowland tried to buy out the remaining shareholders but failed. Those who stayed received no dividend. Then, in March 1981, the share listing was suspended for not informing shareholders of major transactions. Methanol and gold mine ventures in Texas and Canada failed. Rowland announced a bid for the minority and loan stockholders from a Panamanian company; this did not materialise. In March 1982 the company was compulsorily wound up. Prior to this, however, certain assets had been sold to other Rowland companies and it emerged that Rowland also had a charge on some assets.

Rowland profitably moved into and out of London casinos, although his ambitions there were thwarted by the Gaming Board, which refused one application for a Park Lane casino in 1979. It was in casinos that Rowland first partnered up with David and Frederick Barclay, now the knighted owners of the *Torygraphs* but back in the day still recovering from their painful experiences with the Crown Agents scandal. The refused Rowland casino was to have been in the Barclay-owned Londonderry hotel. Rowland sold his last casino interests in 1980.

Casinos were the beginning of a friendship which grew when Rowland moved to Monaco, the tax-hating Barclays' home. Their relationship was further enhanced when Rowland paid the Barclays $41m in February 1989 for a 34 percent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stake in the US-listed Gulf Resources & Chemical. Gulf owned coal interests and a $200m cash pile, which Rowland began to use to purchase assets. These included his share stake in Storehouse for $33m which was soon worth $7.5m. He also announced a plan to migrate the company to Bermuda. This and other deals alarmed other Gulf shareholders and two independent directors who resigned.

Rowland sold out to another less talented but ambitious dealmaker, Graham Ferguson Lacey – described as a "financial pygmy" by Rowland's much older namesake "Tiny" Rowland – in 1991. The price was $16m and a big chunk of Lacey's US company Nycal. This deal duly ended in tears and litigation.

Gulf had been acquired through Inoco, a UK oil company. Inoco was to be yet another instance where David Rowland got the Takeover Panel's attention. Inoco made a hostile £25m offer for rival oil company Petranol. In normal Rowland style, it had already bought a small stake but had more significantly obtained the support and some shares from former chairman Clive Smith. The panel intervened in May 1986 to declare that Inoco and Smith were acting in concert, owned more than 30 percent and as a result Inoco had to offer a cash alternative to Petranol shareholders. The panel stated it was "holding under review the circumstances in which this situation has arisen".

Inoco did not have the cash to bid, so it dropped out. Smith was later a two-time loser on unrelated fraud charges with the Serious Farce Office. Inoco was taken private by Rowland in 1996.

Smith was not the only Rowland business associate to end in jail – albeit on unrelated matters. Rowland and Inoco invested in Edinburgh Hibernian, owners of the Scottish football club Hibernian. The chairman was lawyer David Duff, whom Rowland had funded to buy Hibs. In 1989 Edinburgh agreed to pay more than £5m to Inoco for a pub chain, but the mix did not work. In June 1990 Inoco backed a takeover bid from Hibs' local rivals Heart of Midlothian. The deal was blocked by other shareholders, including Duff. Renamed Forth Investments, the company collapsed in 1991 owing £7m. Hibs was saved by Kwik-Fit millionaire Tom Farmer, and Duff was jailed in 1993 for mortgage fraud.

Rowland reappeared next at the height of the 1999 dot-com bubble, most notably backing the AIM-listed JellyWorks, run by his son Jonathan, just 24 when he became chief executive. Easton Investments, a Guernsey company owned by discretionary family trusts set up for the Rowland children, subscribed £8m for shares at 5p. The price rocketed to 122p within days. By mid-2000 the price was only 27p when the company was taken over – but Easton still made a fat tax-free profit. JellyWorks was wound up in 2001.

Since then David, usually in the background, and Jonathan have popped up in other stock market situations and, true to form, attracted the attention of the Fundamentally Supine Authority in 2003 for derivative trades carried out during a failed bid for London Forfaiting. No action was taken.

That bid was made through AIM-listed Resurge, now renamed Adeste Management Services and controlled by the Rowland Purpose Trust 2001. The company was delisted in 2007. Its latest accounts show net liabilities of more than £8m and a "material uncertainty" about its ability to continue in business.

Jonathan and two other junior Rowland family members (but not David) are authorised by the FSA and run the Guernsey-owned, London-based Blackfish Capital Management. In July, Blackfish acquired the Luxembourg operations of the collapsed Icelandic bank Kaupthing, which has been renamed Banque Havilland.

It is comforting to know that after almost 40 years of very profitably putting two fingers up to the City from assorted offshore tax havens, David Rowland now wants to fund Britain's "national renewal". The question for David Cameron should be whether the Tories need money so badly that the Rowland millions are acceptable.

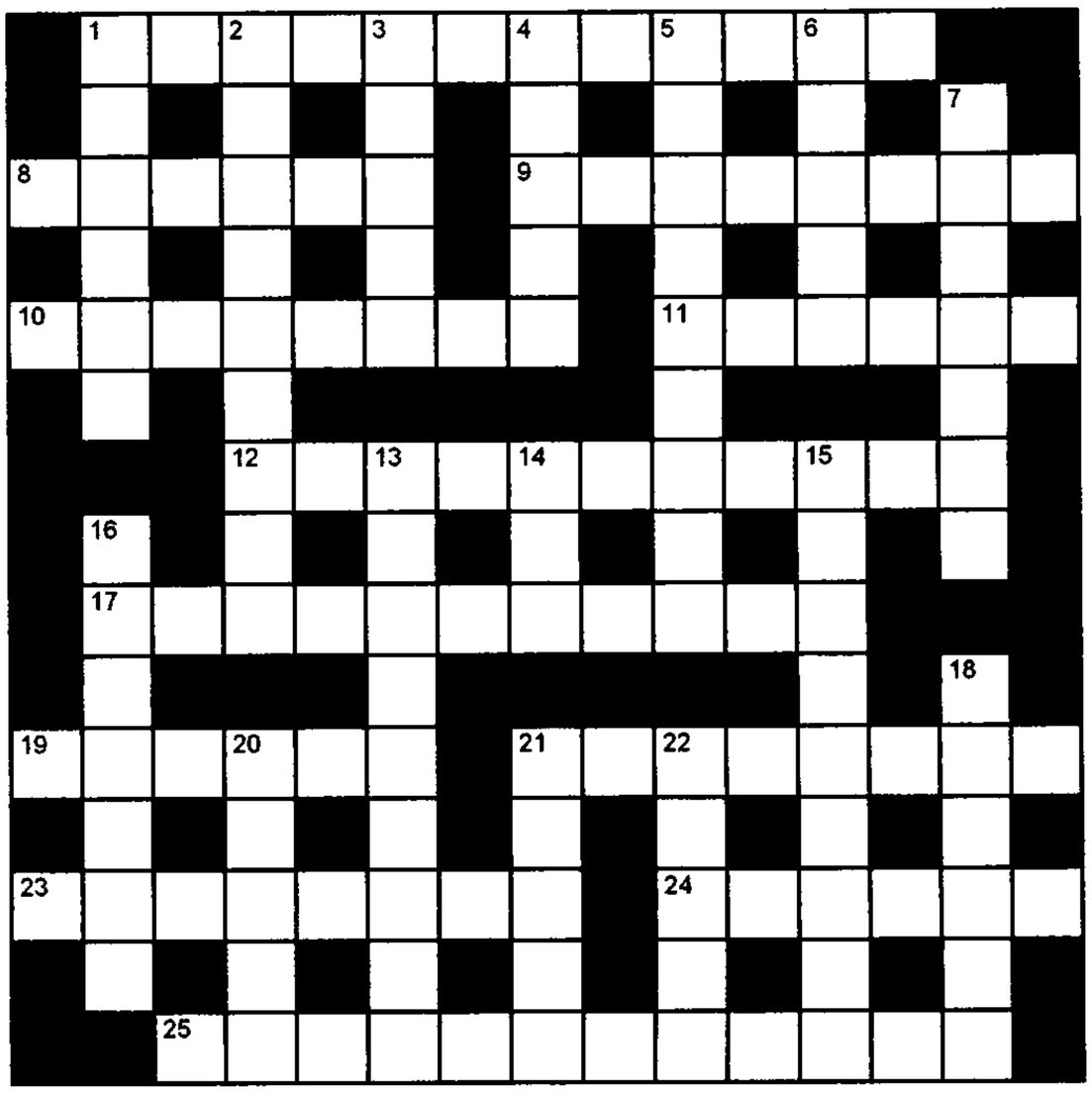
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 399

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 11 September 2009

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 See 12ac.

8 By way of King George, advanced means of getting a rise (6)

9 EU, taken in by falsified tender, lacking balls? (8)

10 In circumstances, Tory hides old family member (8)

11 Far Eastern manufacturer excites Tory to climax (only the fifth – not right) (6)

12/1 MPs' debauched living could mean a general election is imminent (11,2,10)

17 Knocking off Bough and Tim (11)

19 Bill Clinton's first ten screws, in a manner of speaking (6)

21 Not what one saying "Get knotted" expects you to do: put nut out on view (8)

23 Weighty tart, spotted (8)

24/14 The endless blowing of top by PM abroad — given the push (6,3)

25 Congress's position (for those who'd stand for it) (4-8)

DOWN

1 Balls going round, cycling in two directions: cause of tears to the eyes? (6)

2 Babe-like up top, so not bending? (9)

3 Brenda's gone arse up – be a luvvy and show you're aware (5)

4 Archer should be reasonably satisfied with this, being an offender spurning society (5)

5 UFO nut messed with Jim's peak (5,4)

6 Lacking nooky every evening disturbed youth leaders (5)

7 It's instrumental in putting facts of life to Brown: "end of government!" (7)

13 Ex-minister and female exploitation – "it reduces waiting time for a bang" (5,4)

14 See 24ac.

15 Mostly popular? Enlarge bust (2,7)

16 An honour capturing *Sun* arse's hide (7)

18 Arthur Daley's dog, oral sex exponent (6)

20 Slight, sad life, Gordon, finally (5)

21 Personal problem removed from arse is not over (5)

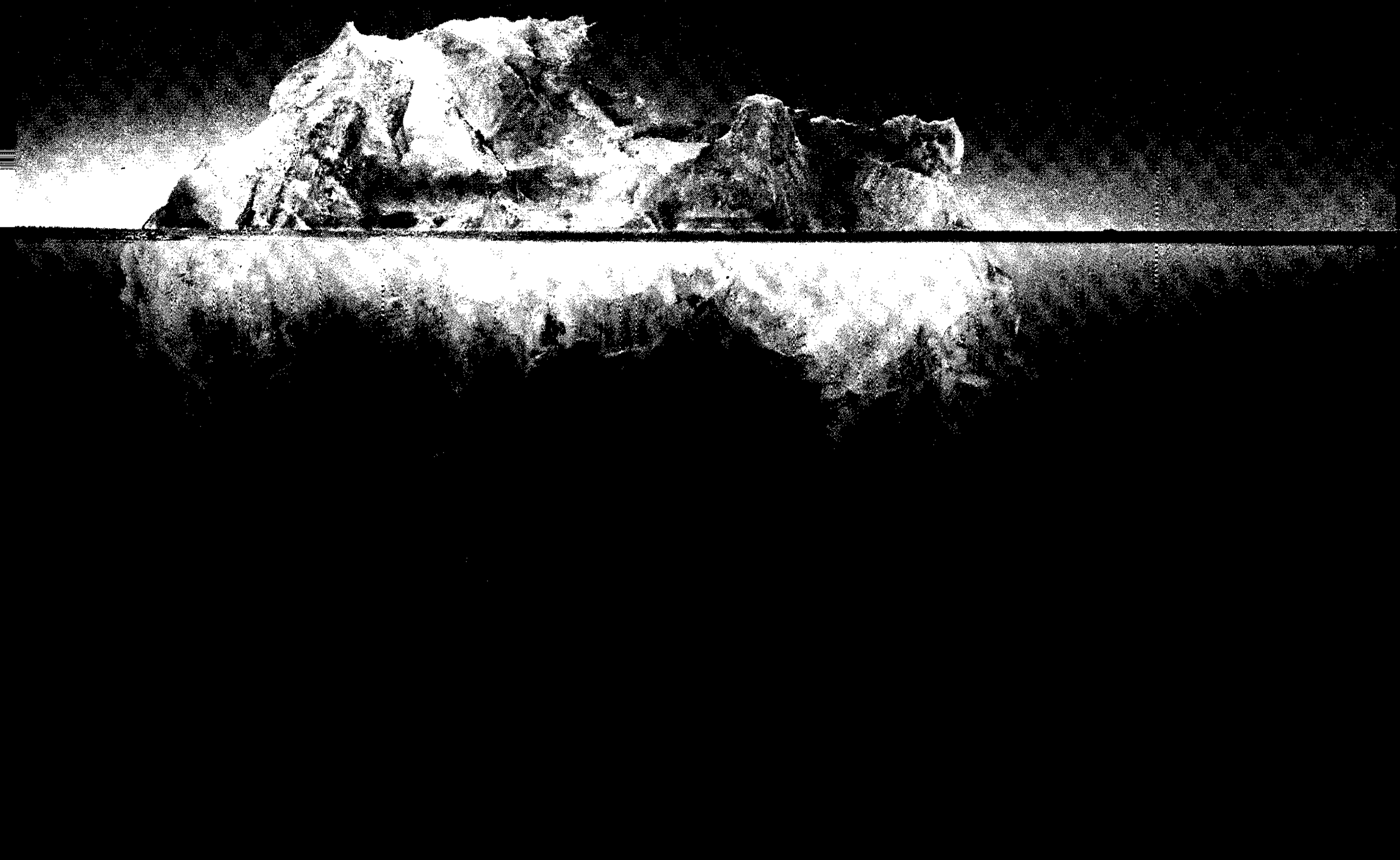
22 Kid those vulgar people it's phallus-shaped (5)

Crossword 398 winner: J. CHAMBERS

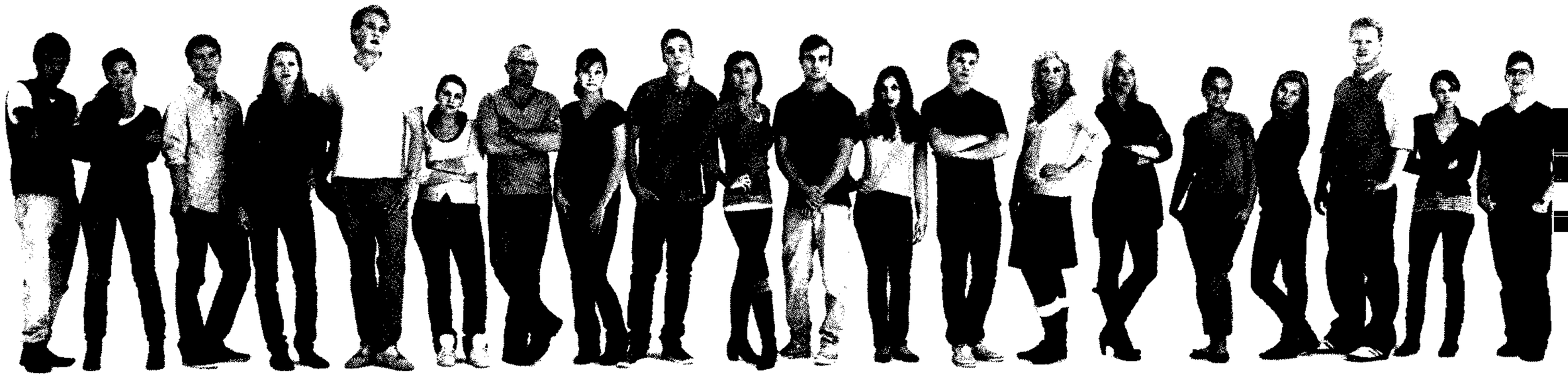
ACROSS: 8 Prithee 9 Holdall 10 Fatal blow 11 Sicko 12 Shit for brains 14 Asexual 16 Condone 18 Downing Street 23 At sea 24 Up the wall 25 Close-up 26 Umpteen.

DOWN: 1 Distaste 2 Chilli 3 Bellyful 4 Shower 5 Close-run 6 T'ai chi 7 Bloodshed 8 Puff 13 Bald patch 15 Urinated 16 Cut it out 17 Outdated 19 Wisdom 20 Grumpy 21 Exempt 22 Flan.

HUSBAND



christian aid



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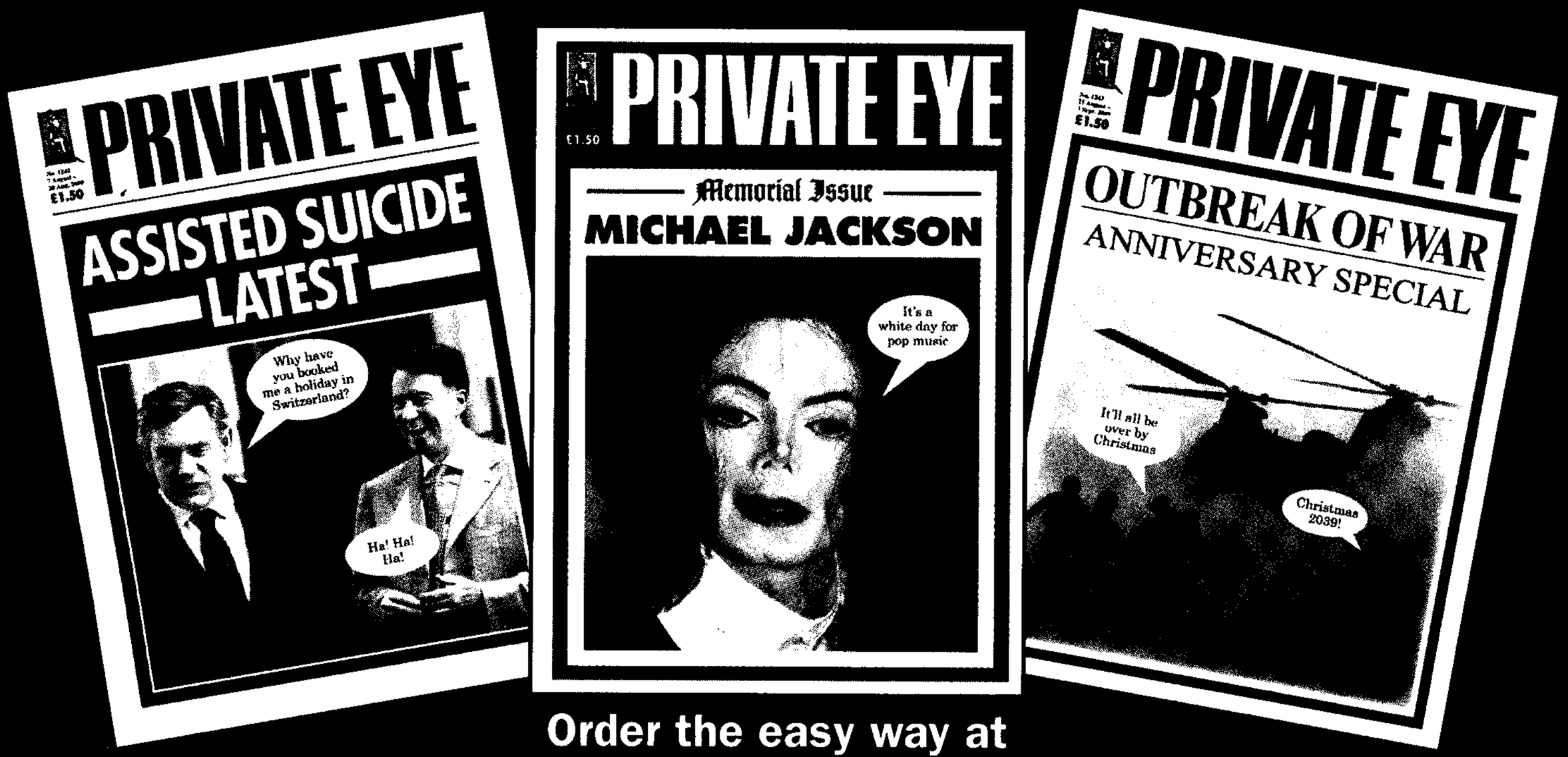

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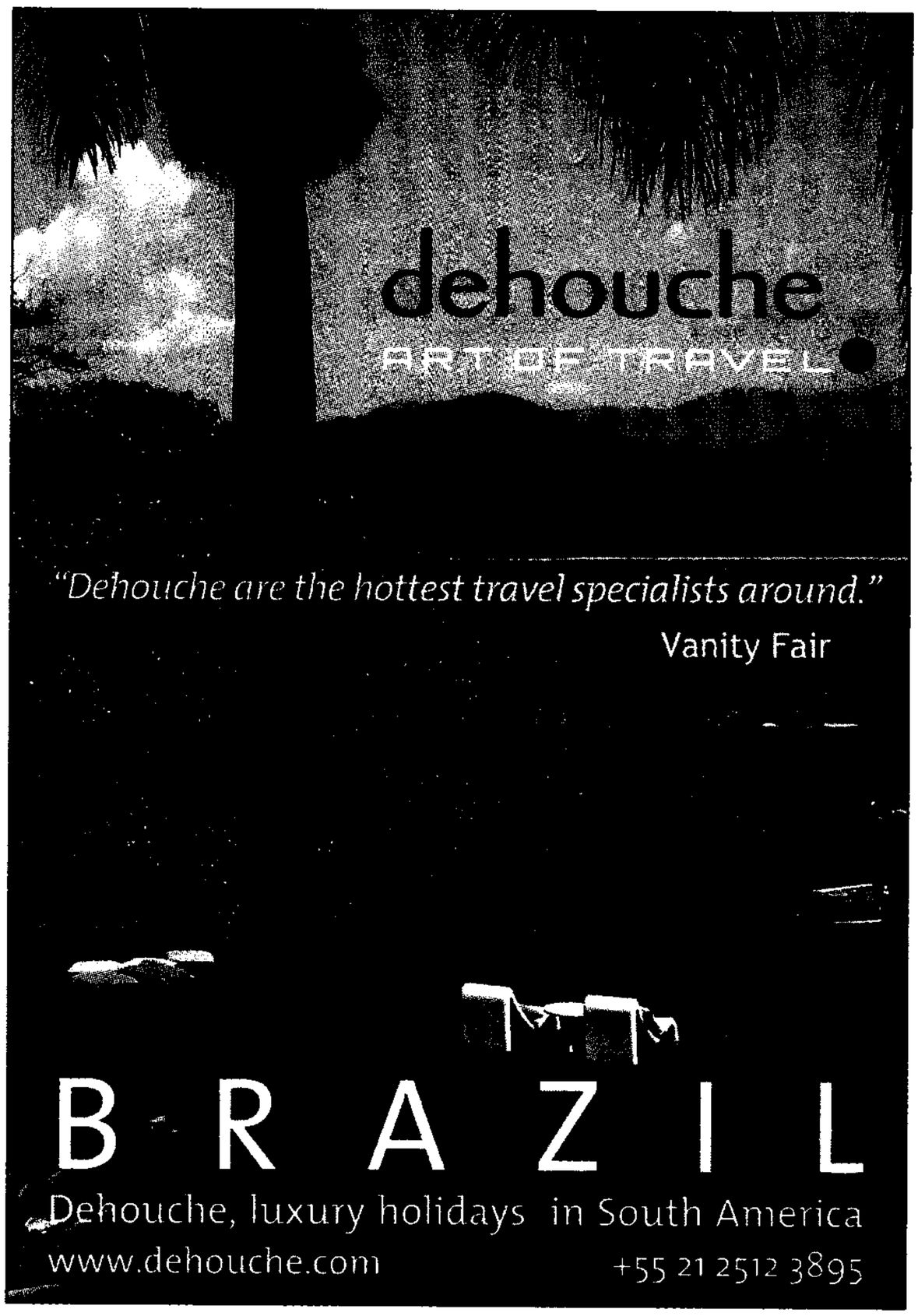

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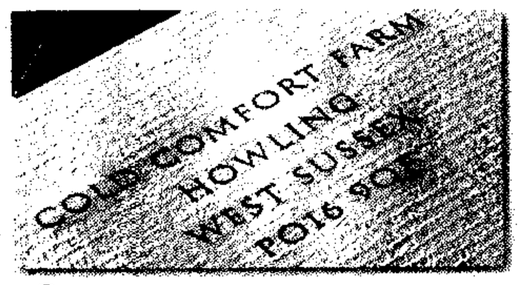

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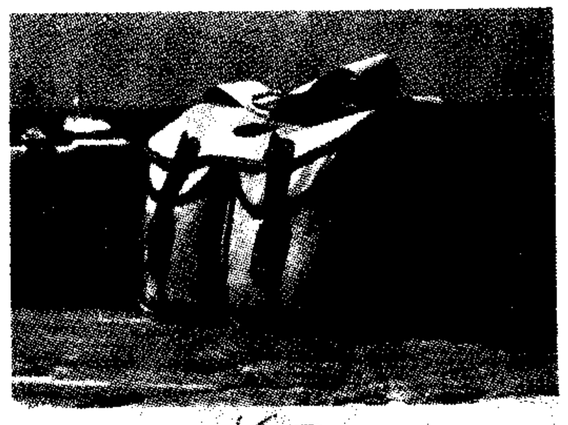

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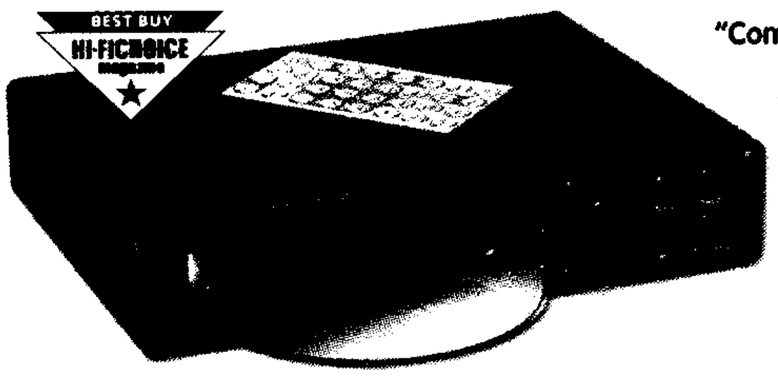

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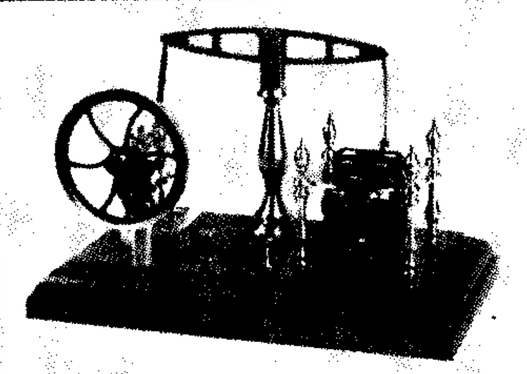

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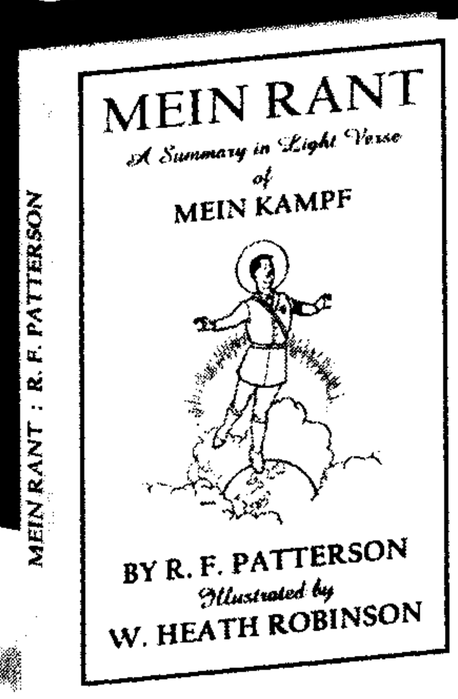

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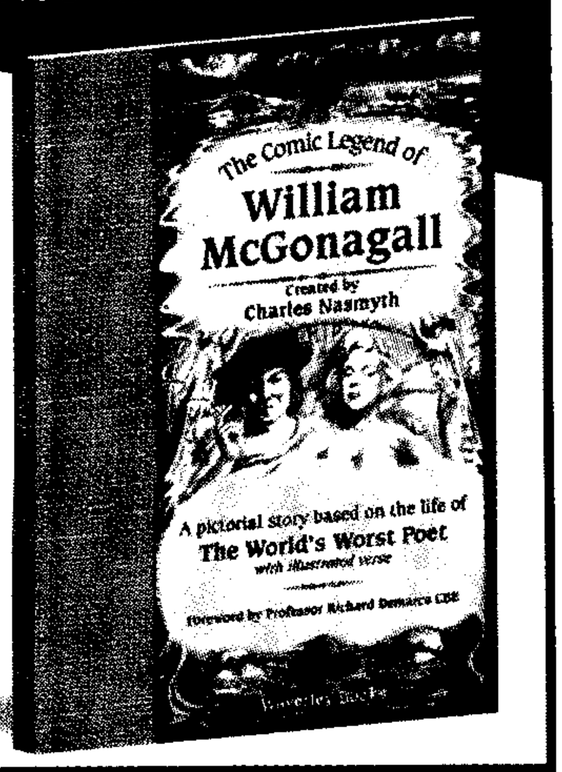

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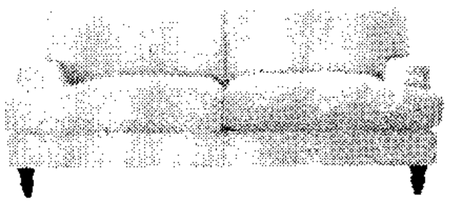

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OM SAI RAM

Don't join the recession – beat it!

.ooking 'the business' more important now than ever, says bespoke tailoring king.

's the question every professional man and woman n the planet is asking right now; what is the best way o present yourself when doom and gloom are in a eck and neck race for world domination?

lore specifically, just how 2009 is sackcloth and shes as a businesswear look? Read the media in nywhere in the world, and you could only conclude hat with the way things are going, the hair shirt, referably with worn-out shoes and a frayed collar ill be only appropriate fashion for the coming year.

ut Hong Kong's pre-eminent master tailor Raja aswani, the man now hailed globally as the world's eading authority on the smart, perfectly fitting, xquisitely-made – yet amply affordable - suit, begs to iffer. 'Dressing for success has never been more nportant than in these days of recession and epression,' he says.

An immaculate suit practically hypnotises people,' xplains the man whose passion for fashion has ransformed the wardrobes – and the lives - of undreds of thousands of men and women orldwide. 'Without making its point loudly or rashly, a fine suit argues with unswervable onviction that its wearer is supremely competent, otally in control and has impeccable taste.'

These above all are the qualities you need to prosper n these difficult times. You look good, feel good, be good and, ultimately, do good.'

'A good, hand-made bespoke suit is as effective as a superb c.v. at giving a good impression. A perfect suit makes your point for you, but subtly. Nobody is resistant to the message a great suit conveys.'

'The effect – some even call it the Raja magic suit effect - is strangely contagious,' he continues.

'People are drawn to well presented people. By contrast, sadly, nobody likes to do business with or associate with people who look like a walking recession. I think there's a feeling that it's catching.'

'I am so convinced by my decades of experience of making fantastic suits at a crazily low price that I virtually guarantee a Raja suit will change your life for the better,' Mr. Daswani concludes.

And because he wants more people to look good and do good in today's challenging world, Mr Daswani's suit empire, Raja Fashions, is pitching into the recession with a couple of incredible offers.

It's not just the unbeatable price of a Raja Fashions suit. (We are talking £169 for a fully made-to-measure summer suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £325 for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand-finished suit in a British or Italian cloth, with every refinement from hand-made buttonholes to knee lining, exotic jacket linings and double thickness pockets.) Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500, costs a third less than it would on Savile Row.

But first off in Mr Daswani's Recession Special Package, he is offering one free hand made-to-measure shirt free with every suit you purchase.

Secondly, special for 2009, he is pledging to give a proportion of the (already amazing) price of each custom-cut, hand-stitched suit he sells to charity.

While you are very welcome to make your way to bustling Cameron Road, Kowloon to visit Raja Fashions' store, the store will equally come to you – in cities all over the world, several times a year. Thanks to the magic of technology, Mr Daswani and his team can measure you up for the full Hong Kong Monty without your needing to travel often further than your nearest big city. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 10,000 miles away before you've even left his mobile sales suite. You can have it sent by courier within a week or so if it's urgent – or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

Over the past thirty soaringly successful years, the Raja suit revolution, with its inspired mix artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, has practically seen off the traditional, ill fitting, robot-finished off the peg British high street suit.

Whether you're attracted by quality, style, price, or sheer convenience, a Raja Fashions suit is the perfect a sartorial solution to tough times.

But be warned. Mr Daswani doesn't do sackcloth.

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